


Community Nomination Form**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

Reference Number	
Date of Validation	

 <p>ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL</p> <p>ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE</p> <p>COMMUNITY NOMINATION FORM</p>
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Section A: About your organisation**A1 Organisation's name and address**

Name of organisation Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council
Registered, main or head office address including postcode 2b Briar Close Bramble Lane Wye, Ashford Kent TN25 5HB

A2 Contact details

Name Katherine Stephens
Position in organisation Parish Clerk
Address including postcode 2b Briar Close Bramble Lane Wye, Ashford Kent TN25 5HB
Daytime telephone no. 01233 812459 (answerphone out of hours)
Email address clerk@wyeparishcouncil.gov.uk

A3 Type of organisation

Description (pursuant to Regulation 5)	Put a tick against that which applies	Registration number (if applicable)
(a) Designated Neighbourhood Forum pursuant to s.61F of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990		
(b) Parish Council	✓	
(c) Unincorporated body with at least 21 members which does not distribute any surplus it makes to its members		
(d) Charity		
(e) Company limited by guarantee which does not distribute any surplus it makes to its members		
(f) Industrial and Provident Society which does not distribute any surplus it makes to its members		
(g) Community Interest Company		

A4 Local Connection (pursuant of Regulation 4)

Unless you are a Parish Council (see below), your organisation must have a local connection, which means that its activities are wholly or partly concerned with the administrative area of Ashford Borough Council or a neighbouring local authority (Reg 4(1)(a)). Please explain what your association's local connection is.

N/A

Please note the following in relation to Community Nominations from Parish Councils (Reg 5(b)) –

A Parish Council making a Community Nomination in respect of land in its parish does not need to show a local connection (s.89(2)(b)(i)).

A Parish Council making a Community Nomination in relation to land in

another parish has a local connection if the two parishes share a common boundary at any point. (Reg 4(2)(a)).

A Parish Council making a Community Nomination in relation to land which is not within a parish has a local connection if the parish is in the borough of Ashford or (if the parish council is outside the borough, it shares a common boundary with the borough of Ashford) (Reg 4(2)(b)).

(If you ticked (c) at Q.A3 please fill out the next question)

A5 Membership of Unincorporated Bodies (Reg 5 (c) (pursuant to Regulation 4(1)(c) and Reg 4(3))

In the case of an unincorporated body at least 21 of its members must be registered to vote in local government elections in the borough of Ashford or in a neighbouring authority's area. Please include a list of the current members of the body and their addresses. If they are registered to vote in the area of a neighbouring local authority, rather than in Ashford, please confirm which area this is.

N/A

(if you ticked (c), (e) or (f) in Q.A3 please answer the question below)

A6 Distribution of surplus funds (Unincorporated Bodies (Reg 5(1)(c)), companies limited by guarantee (Reg 5(1)(e)) and Industrial and Provident Societies (IReg 5(1)(f) (pursuant to Reg 4(b))

If your organisation is an Unincorporated Body, a Company Limited by Guarantee, or an Industrial and Provident Society then any surplus that it makes must be wholly or partly applied for the benefit of the administrative area of Ashford or a neighbouring local authority. Please confirm this and provide evidence by referring to the relevant part of the document provided pursuant to part A7.

N/A

A7 Required Documentation for your organisation (not required if a Parish Council)

Please provide us with an up-to-date copy of the following as relevant to your organisation	Please put a tick against the document provided
Memorandum and Articles of Association	N/A
Trust Deed	N/A
Constitution	N/A
Interest Statement if a Community Interest Company	N/A
Companies House Return	N/A
List of Members	N/A
Minute / authority authorising your organisation to make this Community Nomination	N/A

Part B: Information concerning the land / building(s) which is subject to the Community Nomination

B1 Description and address

<p>Name of land / building(s)</p> <p>Wye Methodist Church, Hall and other rooms within the building (including land forming the front and rear garden and rear car park contained within Land Registry title K96325 boundary detailed in B2).</p> <p>(For simplicity, the nominated asset is referred to throughout this form as 'the building')</p>
<p>Address including postcode</p> <p>Bridge Street, Wye, Ashford, Kent TN25 5DP</p>

*please note that we can only accept nominations for land within the borough of Ashford. If the land you wish to nominate is partly in and partly outside of the borough, then you should nominate that part which is outside of the borough to the appropriate local council in whose are it falls

B2 Detailed plan

<p>Please include (here or on a separate sheet) a detailed plan of the land.</p> <p>See APPENDIX1(a) Land Registry title number K962352 Plan (scale 1:1,250)</p> <p>The plan must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be drawn to scale • be a copy of an extract from the Ordnance Survey map on the largest scale published (generally 1/1250 for urban properties and 1/2500 for rural properties), showing the land to which the application relates • indicate the scale and orientation • show the precise extent of the property by suitable edging (0.4mm max), and • show the position of the land in relation to nearby roads and other relevant features.

*Please note that by submitting the plan, you authorise us to copy and publish as may be necessary

B3 Owners and others with an interest in the land / building(s) (Reg 8)

Please provide the following information to the best that you are able.
If any information is not known to you, please say so.

	Name(s)	Address(es)
Names of all current occupants of the land / building(s) (if there are different occupiers for different parts please provide details)	N/A Please see Land Registry title K96325 extract attached APPENDIX1(a)	
Names and current or last known addresses of all those owning a freehold interest in the land / buildings (s)	Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ
Names and current or last known addresses of all those owning a leasehold interest in the land / building(s)	N/A	

Please answer wither B4 or B5 below -**B4 For Land / building(s) currently in use for community benefit – why you think the land / building(s) is of community value**

1. What is the current main use of the land / building(s)

N/A (See B5)

Context: the building is not in current use for any purpose.

Ordnance Survey maps mark the building with the abbreviation 'PW' - a place of worship. However, for many years prior to its closure the Property Steward responsible for of the building has stated that in actual use it *'effectively functioned as a community centre.'* A place where *'It is not unusual for us to host between 60 and 100 meetings per month with up to seven on a given day.'*

For evidence, see APPENDIX1 (c), APPENDIX5, APPENDIX8, APPENDIX13(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) and APPENDIX18).

2. How does that current main use of the land / building(s) further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community (defined in s.88(6) of the Act)

N/A See B5 below

3. Why do you consider that this, or some other main use to which the land / building(s) will be put which will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, will continue and over what period (defined in s.88(6) of the Act)

N/A See B5 below

For supporting evidence please see the links to online references and the attached appendices.

B5 For Land / building(s) not currently in use for community benefit (s.88 (2) of the act)

1. If the land / building(s) main use in the recent past furthered the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community please confirm that use and explain how it did that (including dates for when this was) (defined in s.88(6) of the Act)

B5 Introduction

Please consider this fresh nomination in the following context:

- A. Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council (Wye Parish Council) nominated Wye Methodist Church (the building) 22nd September 2021. After some delay, the Borough Council validated the nomination form and amended supporting evidence 15th November 2021

APPENDIX27 ACV nomination validated 15th November 2021 reference number [PR86-033/ 00609697](#) and [appendices numbered 1 to 26](#).

- B. As required, the nomination provided detailed reasons that showed why the building is of community value, and how in the recent past it furthered the social wellbeing or social interests of the community.
- C. The Parish Council also provided comprehensive evidence and third-party letters in support, in appendices numbered 1 to 26. The nomination and appendices extended to 385 pages.
- D. The Borough Council decided that '*the nomination fails the test set down in section 88(2)(a) of the Act*' and published its decision and reasons 17th January 2022 in its [Delegated Report ref PR86-033](#).
- E. The Borough Council's [website states that](#) '*the nominated building /land did not meet the statutory definition.*'
- F. The Localism Act 2011 does not provide the nominating body with any right of appeal against the local authority's decision. Therefore, the Parish Council sought Counsel's Opinion. This examined the process followed by the Borough Council, and its general duty to take all relevant matters into consideration.

G. In summary, Counsel concluded that:

- a) the Borough Council erred in law on several points;**
- b) a fresh nomination is a proportionate response.**

- H. On the basis of Counsel's advice Wye Parish Council makes a fresh nomination, supported by new and updated evidence.
- I. The Borough Council's opinion and decision relied on its interpretation of the General Conference of the New Church v Bristol City Council CR/2014/0013 (the New Church case).
- J. In so doing the Borough Council ignored the:
- a) striking differences in the facts between the New Church case and the nominated building;
 - b) rider that Judge Lane, who presided over the New Church case, emphasised that "the context is all" (para. 22);
 - c) facts in the New Church case, specifically that the community use of that church was minimal and declining, differ sharply from the evidence of thriving community use of the nominated building in Wye;
 - d) clear evidence to the contrary from Dr Chapman, the Methodist Property Steward of the building, who confirmed its actual use and social value. His annual report in 2016 stated that it '*effectively functioned as a community centre;*'
 - e) actual community use, which continued until the day of closure. This use was significant in terms of the hours of use per room and the number of community users who participated;
- K. Having evaluated the evidence of past use of the building, Counsel found that its community use was significant and concluded that this level of use alone was sufficient to satisfy the statutory condition in section 88(2)(a) of the Localism Act 2011.
- L. Counsel also concluded that the ACV regime applies to places of worship and that, as a matter of law and in light of the evidence provided, the building merits listing as an ACV.
- M. The Borough Council's decision concluded with the statement that '*in my view, including the nominated premises...could set a precedent for many other places of worship in the Borough.*' This point is extraneous.
- N. Personal views about precedence and any conjectural consequences have no bearing on the required tests under the Localism Act. These tests must be applied to the specific facts of each case and the actual use of the nominated building.

- O. Furthermore, the Borough Council was selective in its approach to its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (S. 149). Although the Borough Council cited section 4 '*religion or belief*' as a protected characteristic, it then omitted to consider other protected characteristics in the evidence provided.
- P. The omission shows that The Borough Council did not have due regard to the needs of all individuals with protected characteristics of disability, and especially those who are also isolated or have other health or socio-economic disadvantages.
- Q. The Borough Council ignored the high level of need in Wye, despite evidence provided in the Our Place Wye [Logic Model](#) APPENDIX 25 a, and under the health and wellbeing headline figures (page 43, APPENDIX 25 b).
- R. The Borough Council also neglected its related duty under the Equality Act to advance equality of opportunity and encourage people to participate in public life.
- S. Instead, the Borough Council ignored the evidence provided which showed a significant level of actual use and its community value, and the evidence of provision for the less able people (APPENDIX 5 a). In so doing it acted against the interests of people with protected characteristics.
- T. In light of Counsel's Opinion, the Parish Council questions the Borough Council's process and decision not to list the building.
- U. To assist the Borough Council the Parish Council provides its Counsel's Opinion as a public document, and for the avoidance of doubt waives its legal privilege.

V. Counsel's Opinion is attached in full as APPENDIX 28 .

[The following text updates and clarifies the Parish Council's case for listing. In support of this nomination the appendices numbered 1 to 26 are attached again, supplemented by Council's Opinion (Appendix 27), and further evidence in appendices numbered 28 et seq.].

B5 Executive summary

1. The evidence of extensive and sustained non-ancillary use of Wye Methodist Church (the nominated building) is strong, long established, recent and very well documented. The evidence in the attached appendices and online links confirms that the building, in its entirety, had furthered the social wellbeing or

interests of the local community for decades.

2. Significantly, the earliest known record of the non-ancillary use of the building as a 'Club room' is dated 23rd January 1915, (see APPENDIX1(c)). This social and recreational use continued throughout World War One, until demobilisation in 1919. Other community uses continued after the war.
3. Post WW2, and into the 21st century until its closure in March 2020, a variety of community uses evolved and community life flourished as the population of Wye grew alongside Wye College. In contrast, the religious use of the building declined.
4. Dr Geoff Chapman, (the Managing Trustee and Property Steward directly responsible for the building for thirty years prior to its closure), summarised its actual use. He reported that: *'as is widely known, our building effectively functions as a community centre with 70-80 meetings per month'* (Report to the Wye Annual Parish Meeting, 2016) (See APPENDIX5, APPENDIX8, APPENDIX13(a), (b) (c) and (e) and APPENDIX18).
5. The Borough Council did not dispute Dr Chapman's statement. Nor at any time did the current managing trustees, nor the custodian Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP). Having accepted Dr Chapman's statement that the building functioned as a community centre until the day it closed, and that its community use was established and significant, it follows that the building furthered community social well-being or social interests.
6. Worship comprised a relatively minor and declining use of the building, when compared to the consistently high and sustained level of community use over decades. Based on the available evidence appended to this nomination, a ratio of 80:20 is a realistic approximation in terms of hours of use.
7. For evaluation purposes for some 80% of the hours that the building was open each year it was used for community activities. Unquestionably these actual uses were significant and furthered social wellbeing or interests of the community. The remaining 20% of its usage being for religious or ancillary purposes and connected secular social activities for the benefit of non-worshippers. Some or all of which also furthered social wellbeing or interests of the community.
8. The building was in active community use up to its forced closure at the start of the first COVID-19 lockdown, and the national prohibition of all gatherings. Until that point, as the South Kent

Methodist Circuit's website acknowledged, it functioned as 'a social centre for all manner of organisations.' (APPENDIX 5a.)

9. Clearly, there are practical difficulties entailed in reopening churches safely. This places 'a particular burden on the local trustees' as stressed by Rev'd Helen Hollands, the South Kent Methodist Circuit Superintendent (APPENDIX 11). In the context of COVID-19 mitigations, there are additional physical difficulties associated with buildings with small spaces and narrow corridors. As the virus is airborne and persistent, ensuring that the ventilation is adequate is more challenging in these confined spaces.
10. The extent of these difficulties is evidenced in the South Kent Methodist Circuit's service diary and website. This recorded the lasting impact of COVID-19 on five (27.7%) of the Circuit's eighteen places of worship in use at the start of the pandemic.
11. As the MSKC Circuit Plan for September 2020 shows, only six of the 17 remaining churches in the Circuit reopened after the first lockdown, and they were only able to do so briefly.
12. A year later the South Kent [Circuit news reported Sunday 5th September 2021](#) that 'the members of Charing Methodist Church were glad to return to worship in their redecorated building this morning. **This was their first service since the first Covid lockdown, wonderful to see everyone, and to remember those who are no longer with us. A lively service was led by Mr Hugh Burnham.**' [Emphasis added].
13. In addition to the closure of Wye, [Appledore Chapel remains closed](#) to date (21 March 2022), and the twice-monthly services are now held at the Anglican church. This is particularly significant in the context of the 'recent use' test under Section 88 9b), (a).
14. Charing Methodist Church remained closed and did not reopen for some 18 months until Sunday [5th September 2021](#).
15. Headcorn Methodist Church also remains closed to date (March 2022). The [Circuit website states](#) that its members now 'meet for worship in Headcorn Village Hall. **Free of the responsibility for maintaining a building we can devote all our resources to our calling.**' [Emphasis added].
16. [Shadoxhurst](#) Church is also significant in the context of the 'recent use' test under Section 88 9b) (a). The website also records that 'Having been closed for 18 months during the pandemic **we have only recently reopened for public worship and hope to get back to a regular pattern of varied services...**' [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX 29 Screenshots of the South Kent Methodist Circuit website pages for Appledore, Headcorn and Shadoxhurst Churches, 2022-0324

17. In conclusion, in light of the evidence which shows that the:

- a) long history of actual secular and non-ancillary activities in the building by a wide variety of community groups, for cultural and recreational uses;
- b) self-evident outcome is that these numerous uses furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community;
- c) uses continued until the recent past, when they were interrupted by the public health and practical safety constraints imposed nationally by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Government restrictions on indoor social gatherings;
- d) Government guidance continues to place responsibility for risk management and public health onto building managers;
- e) wide and lasting impact of COVID-19, summarised by the fact that over a quarter of the places of worship in the Circuit either remain closed, or have '*only recently reopened*';
- f) pandemic is a force majeure: the risk of infection is current and ongoing, and includes long covid following infection;
- g) long established community uses which furthered the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community continued in reality until the 'recent past';
- h) **nominated asset passes both tests under Section 88 (2) (a).**

Overview

18. To reiterate B2 above, the nomination site is the Wye Methodist Church (the building), defined as the freehold land and building under Land Registry title number K962352 (title extract and plan attached), within the red line ownership boundary tinted pink and blue (APPENDIX1 (a)).

APPENDIX1(a) Land Registry title extract and plan dated 8 May 2021.

APPENDIX1(b) For context, the Ordnance Survey extract centred on the site (scale 1:1,250 at A3) shows the internal ground floor division between the two main spaces within the building, much as it was built in 1869, i.e. the original place of worship (PW) and the adjacent Hall. The map does not show internal subdivisions and circulation spaces.

19. In 1980-1981 the trustees agreed to reduce the floor area of the Victorian chapel by about one third and change the shape from a rectangle to an octagon. The reordering created space for an atrium, additional meeting rooms, accessible WCs, kitchens, and stairs to the new mezzanine Thomas Berry Room. The layout included a secondary fire exit route via the Garden Room,

internal circulation space, storage and public noticeboards.

- 20.** The managing trustees instructed the architect [Frank Lee Evans RIBA](#) to redesign the layout explicitly to enable greater community use of the building. This showed the managing trustee's intent to further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community more effectively than, as Lee Evans termed it, the Victorian 'oblong box' could with its hard fixed pews. The reordered layout adapted the building to meet a clear need in Wye for more community spaces and better facilities. These furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community. Looking ahead, the building can be used again for this purpose.
- 21.** The Chapel is the largest of the five rooms. This was also used for community functions on weekdays and Saturdays. These five rooms are [described verbatim in the text provided](#) by the Property Steward Dr Geoff Chapman in the 'Halls and facilities for hire in Wye'. His text stresses that '*Our octagonal chapel, used for Sunday worship, **is available for ordinary meetings during the week.** There are comfortable chairs rather than pews and a movable projector screen is available on request. It seats 60 people and has a hearing loop.*' [Emphasis added].
- 22.** The APPENDIX1 (b) map also shows the rectangular Garden Room, garden and car park to the south of the main building.
- 23.** The APPENDIX1 (b) map has limitations as it does not show the internal layout. This is key to understanding how the building was designed to work, and how the rooms function and interrelate. Nor does the map show the Thomas Berry Room on the first floor above the atrium, the small meeting room and WCs. (Map reproduced under Wye Parish Council's Public Sector Geospatial Agreement, Licence number: Ref. 100051457, 6th July 2011).
- 24.** As in any building with public access, fire safety is the paramount consideration. The need to comply with Building Regulations defines the layout and relationship between the rooms. They are interdependent in terms of the disabled access route and level fire escape route for the whole ground floor. Accordingly, the marked exit route leads through the Chapel and Garden Room. Although the Hall has a kitchen and the three other rooms have basic tea making facilities, they share access to other facilities.
- 25.** Wye Methodist Church (the building) is described in detail in The History of Methodism in Wye (1810-2020) ('Methodism in Wye'), a monograph by Dr C.P. Burnham completed in 2021, now in publication. This paper (para 15.) records the reordering project in

(1980-1981) in detail and that *'the result was greeted with acclaim' and the building 'was immeasurably more attractive.'*

- 26.** Dr Burnham also authored 'A Window on the Church of England: The History of Wye Parish Church 2015, (96 pp.) published by the Wye Historical Society. This referenced the first known non-ancillary use of the building by 300 troopers of the 3rd Hussars as a *'recreational facility'* In January 1915 the Wye Parish Magazine recorded that *'...it is evident that Anglican antagonism continued, for no mention whatever of the Wesleyan community can be found either in 19th Century Vestry minutes or in any issue of the Church magazine from 1889 (the first extant) until 1915, and then only to mention that the **Wesleyan Sunday school room had been made available as a recreational facility for soldiers billeted in Wye.**'* [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX1(c) Wye Parish Magazine report, February 1915 (extract).

- 27.** 'Methodism in Wye' states that: *'the site of the new chapel was at the heart of the village. Just outside was the village pump, its main water supply, now marked by a plaque. This was chosen as the central point of the village during discussions on the recently prepared village plan. The chapel could not now be ignored as a significant part of community life'* [see APPENDIX 3a Objective 1. (page 30) Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2030].
- 28.** The building is located at the crossroads in the centre of Wye, where several desire lines intersect. This provides a natural meeting place for the community, close to shops and facilities.
- 29.** The Parish Council located its original parish notice board on the adjacent wall, where it remained for some 70 years. High footfall and ease of access has enabled the building to flourish as a community hub. As such, the location conferred an advantage on the building and helped it to achieve a high level of daily community activity and social interaction. This in turn furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 30.** Community use of the building also complemented the range of active sports and larger social functions held in the larger spaces at the Village Hall. This facility is also located in Bridge Street, but it is not as central, and does not have level access off the street. Clearly, as Wye Village Hall is approached via a steep slope it is harder to access for those with impaired mobility. Therefore, the Methodist building furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community, particularly disabled people.

APPENDIX2 Ordnance Survey map at 1:5,000 site located at the centre of the 400m walkable village, as defined in the Wye Neighbourhood Plan, Objective 1 (page 30).

APPENDIX3(a) [Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2030](#) (link to document stored on Ashford Borough Council's website)

APPENDIX3(b) a PDF copy of the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2030 (2.4MB file).

Evidence of change and increasing non-ancillary use 1869 - 2020

31. Wye Methodist Church (the building) was built as a place of worship in 1869, and it was funded by public subscription. The adjacent Hall followed soon afterwards. (Originally built as the Sunday schoolroom, this is now also called interchangeably as the Wesley Room / Methodist Hall / Church Hall). The building was Listed Grade II in 1989 (post the reordering works in 1980-1981 to create additional community spaces). A [Historic England photograph](#) taken in 2003 shows the building as it stands today.
32. The entry includes [photographs](#) taken by Helen Morecroft Historic England Listing Systems Programme Manager. She noted in 2017 that *'on the wall directly in front of the church is a local history plaque which claims that near this spot from 1869 to 1911 stood the village pump. The date of the building of this church therefore potentially coincides with the installation of the village pump.'*
33. Until 1911 Wye residents would have converged on the pump in front of the building for the daily chore of collecting their drinking water. Inevitably, the location would have been a natural meeting point and thus a central part of community life.
34. Pre-lockdown, the building also provided, as the South Kent Methodist Circuit web page for Wye states succinctly, **'a social centre for all manner of organisations...'** [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX4 Methodist South Kent Circuit webpages – profiles of all 17 churches in the Circuit, facilities, and preachers' guide to the weekly religious service (see page 33 for the Wye Methodist Church profile and APPENDIX13(d) for service times in September 2020).

35. Indeed, though unplanned the social centre function responded to need. This proved so successful that after WWII it evolved naturally into the primary actual use of the building until 2020.

36. Dr Geoff Chapman (the Wye Methodist Church Property Steward for thirty years until 2021, and Trustee of the Methodist South Kent Circuit) was only stating the obvious when he reported that:

'As is widely known, our building effectively functions as a community centre with 70-80 meetings per month.'

APPENDIX5(a) Annual Parish Meeting Report 2015-2016 (extract) given by Dr Geoff Chapman (published by the Parish Council for residents). The Annual Parish Meeting is a statutory requirement under the [Local Government Act 1972 c. 70 SCHEDULE 12 Part III Parish Meetings 14.](#)

37. Dr Chapman's previous annual parish meeting reports provide further confirmation of the building's role as a community centre. In 2012 he wrote that *'Many people cross our threshold in the course of any week including a number from well beyond Wye...**It is not unusual for us to host between 60 and 100 meetings per month with up to seven on a given day.**'* [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX5(b) Annual Parish Meeting Report 2011-2012 (extract)

38. In 2011 Dr Chapman stated that *'Wye Methodist Church is at or near the centre of the village. In recent years this has come to have an additional meaning since **our building hosts so many community activities. In February and March 2011, for example, the number of bookings exceeded 100** which is remarkable for what, to outward appearance, is just a small country chapel.'* [Emphasis added].

39. Dr Chapman's report also mentioned that **'A point particularly to stress is our gratitude for the care with which our hirers treat the building.'** He also acknowledged that *'during the past year we have been grateful to Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council for a grant in aid toward the cost of new guttering.'*

APPENDIX5(c) Annual Parish Meeting Report 2010-2011 (extract)

Timescale

40. As a place of worship, the building was in continuous recorded use for over 150 years. From the completion of construction until compulsory closure under the first of the [COVID-19 'lockdown laws'](#). These came into force 26th March 2020, and effectively stopped the clock for most of the next 18 months.

41. The government did not lift the first legal restrictions on indoor meetings until 19th July 2021. Only to reimpose them in

subsequent lockdowns. Currently, the responsibility for risk management and mitigation rests with building managers. The building remains closed to all, following the managing trustees' decision to cease worship, and sell the building.

42. The pandemic is not over: the public health risk is ongoing. For context the UK Coronavirus dashboard recorded six COVID-19 deaths in Ashford district in the seven days to 9th March 2022.

Changes in building use 1918 - 2020

43. Over recent decades, the extent of religious use of the building has remained fairly constant at about two to four hours per week. As the congregation aged and the membership dwindled, the services became shorter, more informal and less frequent. In addition to the weekly services there were occasional funerals and wakes.
44. Looking back to 1984 the Wye Village Appraisal recorded that: *'Services are held every Sunday at 6.30pm and on other special occasions. The normal attendance is about 40. There is a prayer meeting on Wednesdays at 1.30pm and a Bible study class on Sunday evenings during term time the 15-20 year-olds meet at 8pm. **The hall attached to the chapel is used by several organisations for coffee mornings and fund-raising events, the Brownies meet here during term-time.**'* [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX6 The Wye Village Appraisal 1984 (see page 35 for the profile of Wye Methodist Church)

45. 'Methodism in Wye' chronicled that from a low of only nine congregants in 1968, the early 1980s marked the post-war high point in the religious use of the building. The congregation **'grew to 28 in 1985'**, but nearly forty years later, **'the average attendance in 2004 was thirteen'**. By October 2020 the congregation had declined further to the point that **'there were now only seven remaining church members.'** [Emphasis added].
46. This level of membership appears marginal and unsustainable. Especially given the need for able volunteers to take day-to-day responsibility for building maintenance and user safety. COVID-19 imposed further public risks and responsibilities. Understandably, it was a critical factor in the decision to close and sell the building.
47. The Parish Council understands from its online meeting with Rev'd Hollands that the loss of letting income during the pandemic was a secondary consideration. However, there is no evidence that

the managing trustees considered any alternative ways to mitigate the social and well-being impact of its loss on the community. Regrettably, the trustees did not ask the Parish Council for financial help or practical support as a way forward.

48. For the national context, a 2021 survey of the impact of COVID-19 on a sample of 1,071 village halls provides reference points. This sample *'represents 10 per cent of all known village and community halls in England'*. The survey found that *'...some halls (1.4 per cent of our sample) will not open again, and this is likely to be a minimum figure. When grossed to the national level this could mean the closure of 140 individual halls...'* *The current financial health of halls is somewhat polarised, with around the same proportion having seen their finances improve or worsen. There appears to be a relationship between the size of the population served and a hall's financial health. Those serving bigger communities have generally seen a worsening in their financial position and heavier reliance on reserves, and this may reflect differing financial models and income streams.'*

49. Wye Methodist Church was not constituted as a community hall, but it *'effectively functioned'* as one in terms of its actual use. Furthermore, it charged comparable room hire rates for its facilities. The Property Stewards faced similar day to day pressures and in 2020 confronted forced closure and loss of income, as did every other community hall. Appendix 30 indicates that the decision to close and sell up was a choice, not an inevitability.

APPENDIX30 Archer, T. and Skropke, C. (June 2021), The impact of COVID-19 on village and community halls in England, Sheffield Hallam University Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, 21pp.

50. As evidence of its goodwill and intent, the Parish Council has offered to either lease the building at a commercial rent, or buy it on the basis of an agreed commercial valuation. **[As this correspondence is commercially sensitive it is not appended].**

51. As an interim measure to protect the fabric during the winter of 2021-2022, the Parish Council also offered twice to cover the cost of heating and dehumidification. TMCP trustees have declined these constructive approaches and offers of financial help.

52. There are historical precedents, as the Parish Council has given financial and planning support for improvement works to the building, and made grants when requested by Property Stewards.

53. In giving these grants of public money (made under LGA 1972,

s.133) the Parish Council recognised the high level of community use and the value of the building to community well-being and the wide range of social interests that it accommodated. (APPENDIX13 (a) lists community groups that used the building).

- 54.** The Ashford, Wye and District U3A provides a clear example of the wide range of social, cultural and recreational interests listed in Section 88 (6) of the Localism Act. This group formed in Wye in 2010, and met initially in the building, but outgrew this space as its popularity and membership expanded. A [U3A Coffee Morning image](#) shows the late David de Saxe, a former chair of Wye Parish Council and an active member of local organisations.
- 55.** Similarly, the [WEA Ashford and Wye Branch](#) is another example. The WEA provided weekly adult education classes in the building for years until it closed. The last meeting being [17th March 2020 at 14.00](#) The ten-week spring music class was titled '*The mighty handful' An exploration of the lives of Borodin, Mussorgsky, Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov and Cui within the political, social and cultural context of the late 19th and early 20th c tsarist Russia.*'
- 56.** In contrast, the South Kent Circuit Membership and Attendance Statistics confirm that the attendance for worship in Wye prior to the pandemic was consistently low. The total Methodist membership recorded for Wye (Circuit 25 South Kent) was 14. For comparison the statistics recorded 12 members in 2018 and 2017. The estimated average attendance figures were similar, with 12 attendees in 2019 and 13 in 2018.
- 57.** For context, pre-COVID-19 the total membership for all seventeen churches in the South Kent Methodist Circuit averaged only 300 members (2017: 299, 2018: 302, 2019: 299). The Circuit covers the whole of Ashford and Folkestone districts and part of Maidstone.

APPENDIX7(a) 2018, (b) 2019 South Kent Circuit Membership and Attendance Statistics (published October 2019) and **(c)** 2017 Summary

APPENDIX7(d) South East District Circuit Membership and Attendance

Examples of community and religious uses

- 58.** 'Methodism in Wye' draws on the Wye Parish Magazine archive to cite the first known record of non-ancillary use of the building as a recreation centre. This practice started during WWI.
- 59.** '*Sadly the Wesleyan Sunday School lapsed during the 1914-18 War, probably in 1916 when the schoolroom was taken over as a*

recreation centre for Royal Flying Corps personnel stationed at the training airfield off Bramble Lane. But such Wesleyan contributions to village life were little regarded. A Parish Magazine had been started by the Anglican Church in 1889, but it contained no mention whatever of the Wesleyans or their local activities until 1923. So much so that when, in 1918, the Wesleyan **schoolroom was used for a function**, the Parish Magazine gave thanks not to the Wesleyans but to the Royal Air Force, whose use of the room had been interrupted!' [Emphasis added].

60. The Wye Parish Magazine (APPENDIX1 (c)) recorded that the first troops to be billeted in Wye were 300 troopers of the 3rd Hussars reserve. Subsequently, Royal Flying Corps personnel were billeted in homes around Wye in 1916 until the aerodrome closed in 1919. Some will have occupied the bedrooms vacated by the sons and daughters of Wye who were serving overseas. Naturally these young men and women socialised and took part in village life (see APPENDIX8(a)). Their involvement was recorded and it was clearly welcomed and actively encouraged by Wye residents.
61. Fifteen men were killed in training flights over Wye. Eight of these casualties remain buried in Commonwealth War Graves Commission [graves in Wye churchyard](#). The names of all fifteen RFC and RAF casualties are recorded on a [bronze plaque](#) in Wye Church porch, dedicated in 2014 by the Bishop of Dover. In 2015 Wye Parish Council protected Churchfield Green in perpetuity as a [Centenary Field](#) and inscription on the memorial stone beside the village sign records that is '[dedicated to those who served at Wye Training Aerodrome Bramble Lane During World War 1](#)'
62. As further evidence of the legacy of WWI and its impact on the community today a [film records the history of Wye aerodrome](#) in WWI and its significance in the relationship between residents past and present, and the air crew who were stationed in Wye.
63. There is a dramatic example of this interconnection. An aircraft from Wye Aerodrome crashed into the Kings Head Hotel in Church Street, Wye as the pilot flew low to celebrate a friend's wedding in the nearby parish church. Amazingly, the pilot survived the crash, as did the Kings Head.
64. Extracts from the [war diaries of Cpl Gordon Tucker](#) provide an intimate insight into one serviceman's close involvement with Wye residents and village life while he was billeted in Wye 1917-1919.

APPENDIX8(a) Extracts from the war diaries of Cpl Gordon Tucker: his close involvement in village life.

65. Cpl Tucker's diaries provide evidence of this close relationship. The servicemen and women who served in Wye, though transient, still deserve to be considered as members of the resident community. Therefore, their contributions to village life form an integral part of the building's long history of non-ancillary use.
66. 'Methodism in Wye' does not shed light on the interwar period, but history repeated itself as it records that *'during the Second World War the schoolroom was used in the week as a canteen'*.
67. Post-war documentary evidence confirms that since WWII the whole building has been used for an increasingly wide range of secular activities, including the chapel, albeit to a lesser extent. Consequently, a wide range of cultural and recreational community activities furthered social wellbeing or interest, and these benefitted all age groups. These community uses continued until they stopped abruptly on the day the building closed in March 2020.
68. For further historical context, 'Methodism in Wye' provides insights into both the religious and community uses of the building since 1927, as the following excerpts highlight in approximately chronological order. For example, the monograph notes that: *'the earliest extant Circuit Plan, for October to December 1927, when the minister was the Revd. Arthur J. Summerfield, records that Wye Wesleyans had 27 members. The only Sunday Service was at 6-30, but there was a fortnightly weeknight service on Mondays at 7.'*
69. *'After the end of the War, the Sunday School continued to thrive. The Wye Guides and Brownies, the Methodist Women's Pleasant Hour (established in 1950), the Anglican Mothers' Union, and, at times, a Youth Club and various handicraft classes also met in the Schoolroom... In 1947 Mr. Buddle and Mrs. K. Bailey were Society Stewards and Mr. F.C. Smith was chapel steward, and there were 17 members.'*
70. *'On completion of the refurbishment there was a celebration on 16 November, 1949, ...and greetings were expressed by the Vicar of Wye, the Revd. J.N. Wells and the Principal of Wye College, Dunstan Skilbeck. So, by this time, the Methodist Church was well accepted as part of the Wye community, although there were **only 15 members**. From 1949 until 1954 there was a Sunday morning service at 11, in addition to the usual evening service at 6 p.m. There was a Young People's Fellowship and a Junior Club.'* [These two activities have long ceased, emphasis added].

71. 'Between 1946 and 1952, Wye Methodist Sunday School was more active than at any other time in its history, reaching a roll of more than 70 children. **Its activities reached out into the whole village community.** For example, in May 1949, the Sunday School held a Flower Service in the village hall, during which children presented bunches of flowers to fifty of the oldest inhabitants of Wye.' [Emphasis added].
72. 'The morning service was discontinued from July 1954, leaving only an evening service, now at 6.30, as would remain the situation for many years. **During 1955 the membership roll was reduced from 23 to 14...** 'so the later 1950s were a difficult time for Wye Methodist Church. Nevertheless, the Women's Pleasant Hour was flourishing. There was still a Youth Club, under the leadership of Geoffrey Hunt, and the Sunday School continued, **albeit much reduced in size,**' [Emphasis added].
73. 'For such a small church, there were a good range of activities. On the third Sunday in the month, there was a Family Service at 9.45 a.m. otherwise Sunday School was at 10 a.m. The main Sunday service was at 6.30 p.m. The Women's Pleasant Hour met on the second and fourth Thursday at 2.45 p.m. **Brownies and Guides met regularly in the schoolroom;** a Church Youth Club existed intermittently. **However, although all these activities were reasonably well supported, the actual membership of the church was very small (only 9 in 1968).**' [Emphasis added].
74. 'In 1971, Geoffrey and Mona Chapman joined the Church, following Geoff's appointment as a lecturer at Wye College. With Paul Burnham [the author of 'Methodism in Wye'] and Jeanne Ingram he started a '**Coffee Bar Youth Club**' in the Schoolroom on Monday evenings with **table tennis, billiards and table football accompanied by rather loud music.** Its somewhat turbulent history lasted until 1985.' [Emphasis added].
75. 'The 1980s also saw a great flowering of other activities connected with the church... The Women's Pleasant Hour flourished, with attendances sometimes exceeding 20, and continued through the nineties with much input from Joyce Haynes, who also served as a Communion Steward and pastoral visitor. The renewed building made an attractive venue for ecumenical activities. A united service with the other Wye churches was held in it on Ash Wednesday 1984, a Lent course of devotional meetings in 1985 and a service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1987. **Village activities also made use of the building, such as the Brownies, a foot clinic and a dancing class. For a time a 'Pop In' session for lonely people drew in forty or fifty.**'

[Wye Brownies moved to the Village Hall over 30 years ago, but the foot clinic and dancing classes continued until March 2020, emphasis added].

76. *'Best of all the renewal of the building marked the beginning of a period in which the church grew and flourished. A membership of 23 in 1981 grew to 28 in 1985, and there was strong support from Wye College students, both undergraduate and postgraduate.'* [The last students left Wye College in 2009].

77. *'With the departure of the Turners and the arrival of a new Ashford Baptist minister, the number of students attending services dropped to just one or two. **The average total Sunday congregation fell from about 30 in 1985 to 23 in 1993 and only 17 in 1997.**'* [Emphasis added].

78. *'The buildings of Wye Methodist Church were comprehensively reconstructed in 1980-1, following the failure of one of the trusses in the roof, and the chapel became an attractive venue for occasions with small congregations. For about eight years united Lent services and some monthly services of the Anglican Wye and Brook Fellowship were held there. As **the only regular Methodist service was on a Sunday evening** and evensong [in Wye Parish Church] was by now only monthly, there were also several people who attended both churches.'* Burnham CP, A window on the Church of England: the History of Wye Parish Church, (2015). [Emphasis added].

79. *'Methodism in Wye' describes the final 20 years, culminating in the pandemic, the unexpected death of the new Property Steward Les Johnson, and the trustee's final decision to 'cease worship' and close Wye Methodist Church in October 2020.*

80. Les Johnson was a qualified building professional who had his office nearby in Wye. Had he lived and shouldered responsibility for managing the building during the pandemic, and added COVID-19 mitigations, the congregation may have felt able to reopen the building for community use and to continue worship.

81. The chapter headed *'Witness amid difficulties and decline in the twenty first century'* is a detailed chronicle of events facts and figures. This provides evidence of the steady decline in religious use of the building in the twenty years, prior to the pandemic.

APPENDIX8(b) In the final chapter headed *'Witness amid difficulties and decline in the twenty first century'* 'Methodism in Wye' records how the use in the building has evolved and changed its emphasis

since the building was first used as a recreation centre in 1916. ***'when the schoolroom was taken over as a recreation centre for Royal Flying Corps personnel stationed at the training airfield off Bramble Lane.'***

[Emphasis added].

82. Though even in the distant past recorded membership of the Wye Methodist Church was low relative to the active community use of the building during the week. The membership declined, despite the substantial growth in the resident population of Wye over the past century. Whereas the need for community facilities continues to grow along with the expanding population, the religious use declined to the point that its seven remaining congregants decided to 'cease worship' in October 2020.

83. In contrast to the gradual decline in religious use since WWII, by 2020 the building had evolved a new primary use. The building functioned as a lively and vital community centre, where many different social activities flourishing all year round, alongside its residual use for worship and religious purposes.

84. Only on very rare occasions religious needs did take precedence over regular bookings. Indeed, the Parish Council can only identify one example of this. On the 19th September 2013 the Margaret Giles School of Dance notified parents that: *'unfortunately we are unable to have the hall on this day as it is being used for a Canterbury Diocese training event. I'm really sorry for this inconvenience. Therefore the Thursday Wye classes are for 10 weeks this term.'* (See APPENDIX15).

Recent past

85. When defining the term 'recent past', please note that the pandemic intervened and prevented the normal pattern of room hire and community uses from happening. Up to the point of closure these uses furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.

86. Practical obstacles aside, in England, the legal restrictions during the pandemic suspended the legal possibility of its use for most of the 18 months prior to the validation of the first ACV nomination.

87. In reality, the building manager and trustees found themselves confronted by force majeure.

Impact of COVID-19 and closure

88. The cumulative impact of lockdowns and restrictions, and the unexpected death of Les Johnson seems to have precipitated the Wye Methodist Church member's decision to cease worship, and not reopen the building for community use.

89. This decision in October 2020 was unexpected. Moreover, it was contrary to the optimistic announcement the previous month in the September 2020 edition of the Wye Parish Magazine.

90. The Rev'd Helen Hollands, the Superintendent stated that: **'we are working towards reopening at the end of the year but the government guidelines are comprehensive and we do not have the capacity (in terms of people who are able to do the necessary work) to reopen.** These requirements are more challenging in smaller buildings.' The article ending with the reassurance that 'we will keep you posted!' [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX9 September 2020 Wye Parish Magazine (page 7) Methodist South Kent Circuit (MSKC) Superintendent Rev'd Helen Hollands' article states the trustees' intention to reopen Wye Methodist Church.

91. Rev'd Hollands reassurance proved misleading. There was no report in the October magazine and the second lockdown prevented publication of the November edition. Then, three months later Rev'd John Makey the supernumerary minister at Wye Methodist Church wrote a short piece in the Wye Parish Magazine. In this he announced the decision to close the building as a fait accompli.

APPENDIX10 December /January 2021 Wye Parish Magazine article, by Rev'd Makey, and a sample of emails from residents in response.

92. Rev'd Makey opened his article by saying that: 'When earlier in the year Wye Methodist Church ceased worship and the chapel was closed also for **hosting the many village activities who used the excellent premises** it was hoped that once the lock down resulting from Covid 19 was over the premises would reopen and worship **and other activities would resume.** Sadly that will not happen.' [Emphasis added].

93. To extract the key points in Rev'd Makey's article, he went on to state that: 'it was decided that ...the chapel be allowed to 'cease worship' 'Once approval for that has been granted it is **likely that the property will be sold.**' [Emphasis added].

- 94.** Confronted by this unexpected announcement in the Parish Magazine (published by Wye Parochial Church Council, just before Christmas), the Parish Council met to consider its response. The Parish Council resolved first, to seek residents' views (see APPENDIX 10) and second, to open a constructive dialogue with the Methodist South Kent Circuit trustees to explore options and find a way to retain the building for community use.
- 95.** In preparation for these negotiations, the Parish Council confirmed that it has the financial and other resources needed to acquire the building and bring it back into active community use. Subsequently, the Parish Council has kept residents informed.
- 96.** For context, in January 2021 England was in the third lockdown, and COVID-19 related deaths were exceeding 1,000 a day.
- 97.** Rev'd Hollands learned of the Parish Council's concern and her first email pre-empted the Parish Council's formal approach to her. She emailed the Parish Clerk as follows: *'I understand that you have been in touch **regarding our decision to close the Methodist church in Wye and to sell the building.** You may be unaware that we are hoping to worship alongside the Anglicans in the parish church so I am pleased to say that the worshipping community will not be lost to the village.'* [Emphasis added].
- 98.** *'Of course the Methodist church has had a role in the village for many years and, in addition to worship, by providing a space available for lettings for various social and other groups.... 'We are sorry that this will be a loss to the village but it is simply unfair to expect a very small group of older people to manage the premises and **sadly we do not have the capacity in the Methodist circuit to manage it ourselves.**'* [Emphasis added].
- 99.** The Parish Council had had no previous contact with Rev'd Hollands prior to her first email. The following correspondence over two months is attached for reference (APPENDIX 11). This confirms that both parties recognise the value of community use of the facilities, and the loss as a consequence of closure.
- 100.** Eventually the Rev'd Hollands, agreed to the Parish Council's requests for a meeting. The notes of this exploratory meeting held 13th April 2021 via Teams record the discussion in detail. This provides relevant evidence to support this nomination.
- 101.** Rev's Hollands did not challenge the use or significance of the community use of the building, or by extension, that its use had furthered social wellbeing or interests of the local community.

102. The Parish Council provided Rev'd Hollands and Liz Talbot, the Senior Circuit Property Steward with these meeting notes, and neither disputed them as a record of the discussion.

APPENDIX11 Correspondence between Rev'd Hollands and Wye PC

APPENDIX12 notes of the online meeting 13th April 2021, with Rev'd Hollands and her colleague Liz Talbot, Cllr. Noel Ovenden the chair and Wye Ward member and Cllr Richard Bartley represented Wye Parish Council. The Parish Clerk attended to record the meeting.

Evidence that the building functioned as a centre where community activities that further 'social wellbeing or interest' flourished.

103. Externally the building has changed little in appearance since it opened in 1869. However, as discussed above, the managing trustees repaired and reordered the building in 1980-1981. This reduced the chapel in size, and the seating capacity from 100 to 60 to reflect the declining need for worship space.

104. The reordering replaced all the 19th C pews with chairs to create a flexible multi-purpose space. The works also provided heating and disability access to update the whole building, and included accessible WCs, and other modern comforts.

105. The reordering of the chapel in replaced the original 'oblong box' with the present-day five room layout. This major project and investment responded to both the rising need for more community spaces, and the parallel decline in church attendance and membership.

106. Form follows function: 'Methodism in Wye' describes the reordering and the building layout that we see today. The building gives physical expression to the shift in focus from worship as its main purpose towards more community uses.

107. In 'Methodism in Wye' Dr Burnham records that: '*the result was greeted with acclaim. The church was reduced in size by introducing a vestibule and a small extra room, but was immeasurably more attractive. It was carpeted, with space for 60 chairs, instead of very uncomfortable pews seating 100.*'

108. Throughout the following 40 years, and much thought and ingenuity, the dedicated volunteer Property Stewards made incremental improvements to [these five spaces](#). They made the most use of the building, and continued to upgrade its facilities as funds allowed. For example, recent improvements include a

hearing loop, and glass doors with hold-open door retainers for ease of wheelchair access and fire escape route purposes.

- 109.** The recent fitting of acoustic panels in the Hall benefitted all building users, including those without impaired hearing. Wye Parish Council used the building regularly for meetings in public and was just one of many beneficiaries of this upgrade.
- 110.** This transformed the Hall (Wesley Room) as a comfortable venue for the Parish Council's frequent meetings in public. 'Methodism in Wye' confirms that: *'the Wesley Room, and to a lesser extent the Thomas Berry Room, **were used almost every day of the week for community activities**, including Parish Council committees and exhibitions. Whereas 'the Church proper is used much less, although the Pentecostal Church has resumed using it for their Sunday morning service...'* [Emphasis added].
- 111.** As further clear examples of [public exhibition use](#), two Wye residents presented a [pop-up gallery](#) and the Parish Council provided a drop-in and Q&A in the Thomas Berry Room to supplement the [online WYE3 Masterplan consultation 1st May to 6th May 2018 10.00 - 20.00](#). Taylor Wimpey used the Hall for a [public consultation on its WYE1](#) housing development proposals. Being the largest development proposed in Wye since 2006 the consultation day attracted a large number of local people.
- 112.** Wye Ground Force provides examples of social events as volunteers met in the building for [crocus bulb planting events](#) or regular litter picks, followed by refreshments. Another example is the Parish Council's invitation in a [newsletter delivered to each household](#) to attend a social drop-in in the building to say farewell to the retiring Parish Clerk, and to meet her replacement.
- 113.** The Ashford Pentecostal Church referred to in 'Methodism in Wye' is peripatetic, and its membership has now outgrown the chapel in Wye. Though its website [home page image](#) still shows Wye Methodist Church, this congregation meets in larger premises in Stanhope. This venue also has over three times as many parking spaces. The [risk assessment](#) for the Stanhope venue (dated May 2019) states that *'the main hall can hold approximately 120 people standing (approximately 80 sitting)'* furthermore, *'there is a car park to the front of the building, with space for approximately 15 cars (plus 2 disabled spaces).'*
- 114.** Ashford Pentecostal Church is an example of a natural process where groups form and grow. First, there must be spaces for them to form. The building, with its mix of relatively small

affordable rooms is an ideal 'nursery' for new community groups.

- 115.** Looking ahead to B5.2 and (s.88 (2) (b)), a facility that enables new community groups to come together will further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 116.** As evidence of how the building supported community life, the search engine behind the [Parish Council's website](#) shows 479 references to 'Methodist' 261 to 'Wesley' and 262 to 'Thomas Berry'. Inevitably, these search terms overlap, but it indicates the high level of activity in the building. The website only went live in 2015. Consequently, it only records the meetings and events held in the five years before the pandemic.
- 117.** Furthermore, the Parish Council's online public diary understates the number of meetings held in the building. Many community events were not advertised on the website and some events e.g. job interviews, and working group meetings were never recorded either as there was no need or reason to do so.
- 118.** In retrospect, over the past forty years the Property Stewards' investment of their time and limited resources shows their extraordinarily strong and sustained personal commitment to the future of the building.
- 119.** The need for more community space was evident in the early 1980s and the reordering works responded to that need. In return, the room hire income has helped the Property Stewards to maintain and upgrade the building over the years.
- 120.** **APPENDIX13(a), (b) and (c)** Community group room users, derived from bookings in 2019-2020

APPENDIX13(d) services in Wye across all three places of worship Wye Parish Magazine September 2020

- 121.** 'Methodism in Wye' records the working relationship between the denominations in Wye and community users of the building as follows: '**rent income from outside users** helped in funding further improvements to the buildings. In 2004 the kitchen was upgraded and two toilets, one for the disabled, were installed. In 2018, a sophisticated fire alarm system was fitted. **Wye Methodist Church has continued active community involvement**, for example, as a valuable weatherproof base for the annual Christmas Street Party and as a base for the village tidying sessions of Wye Ground Force.' [Emphasis added].

122. As an example of an 'outside user', Margaret Giles was a Wye resident. She founded the Margaret Giles School of Dancing just after WWII and ran ballet, tap and modern dance classes in Wye for many years. The Parish Council understands from the present and previous director (who took over the school from Margaret Giles), that it operated in the building for over 40 years. The MG Dance newsletters (APPENDIX15) confirm that it ran classes for seven hours a week during term time, until lockdown.

123. Additionally, the generations of children who gathered for lessons in the building after school with their parents and siblings had thousands of hours of informal socialisation time while they changed in the atrium and small meeting room, or waited on the steps outside. There they mingled with the other parents and children waiting for the next class.

124. This incidental waiting time spent weekly in close proximity with other residents is unquantifiable, but it helped to reinforce social networks and friendships for generations of young families. As such, this waiting time spent in the civic spaces outside the dance classes also furthered social wellbeing or interests. The same benefit applies to many occasions when a group gathered in the atrium waiting for the preceding group to finish and leave.

APPENDIX14 Letter from the proprietor of the Margaret Giles School of Dancing (MG Dance)

APPENDIX15 MG Dance newsletters and 2019 timetable of Wye classes held in the building and Wye Village Hall (highlighted website extracts)

125. The weekly Pilates classes provide another example of a regular 'outside user' and this was long-established non-ancillary community use. Each class provided three hourly sessions for eight people for (as APPENDIX 16 confirms), at least twelve years.

126. In simple terms of the number of building users multiplied by the hours of use, each week there were numerically approximately twice the number of Pilates practitioners compared to the number of worshippers. The membership and average attendance for worship being only about twelve.

APPENDIX16 Email from a Wye resident and Pilates practitioner for 12 years, and a web page confirming hours dates and hours of two of the regular Pilates classes held every week in the Hall.

127. Fear of crime is corrosive to social wellbeing, and a barrier to participation in community life.

128. Activities that could further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community, will not benefit vulnerable residents if they are too fearful to go out, especially in the dark evenings. Clearly low participation is not in the interest of the community. Conversely, if fear of crime is low, then a sense of greater safety and satisfaction will be positive for community wellbeing.

129. In response Kent Police held a [local public engagement meeting](#) in the Chapel (not the Hall as advertised), just before the pandemic. The Parish Council has a duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 to prevent crime and the fear of crime. In mind of this duty, it paid for the room hire, as Kent Police did not have the necessary licence in place to book the room.

130. The Parish Council considered it essential that the meeting was held indoors if it was to attract older residents and provide effective engagement. The Parish Council supported the event with refreshments, [advance publicity via its website](#) and social media channels, and designed and printed posters. This event is an example of the Parish Council's general enabling role in supporting other bodies that work in the community's interest.

131. *'PCSO Aaron Newell will be holding a drop-in meeting at in Wye 26th November. This is to enable residents to raise concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour, face-to-face. **The meeting in the Methodist Hall, Bridge Street**, will start at 18.00 and include Neighbourhood Watch. ...Wye parish councillors will be providing refreshments during the evening, and be on hand to answer questions about other local matters.'* [Emphasis added].

APPENDIX17 Letter from a Wye resident who attended the Police drop-in 26th November 2019 in the chapel within Wye Methodist Church.

132. In making its decision to cease worship and close the building the Methodist Church considered its priorities and the resources of the church. The Rev'd Hollands confirmed to the Parish Council that the advanced age of the members of the Wye church community was a key factor in this decision to close.

133. In contrast to the dwindling and ageing congregation, the building supported a very healthy level of community use. Indeed, activities were often constrained by the practical matters of room availability, diary clashes and meeting time overruns.

134. The Police and Yoga class provides a clear example of this constraint. The Parish Council booked the Hall for this public meeting, but on the night a yoga class using the Hall overran so

the Police moved the meeting to the chapel instead.

- 135.** Consequently, the building was a lively, well used and valuable community asset. This facilitated a hive of social activity and supported volunteerism and the building worked hard to further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 136.** Furthermore, the central location of the building ensured that the whole village could access it on foot. This is a key consideration for people with needs and mobility constraints.
- 137.** As an indication of the likely level of need in Wye the National Census 2011 recorded 421 people with a long-term health problem or disability, 220 households without access to a car or van (20.9% of all Wye households), and 230 single person households where the occupant was aged over 65.
- 138.** Ease of access and the central location gives the building a significant geographical advantage as a social centre. This enabled the building to repurpose itself over time to function as a hub in the centre of community life: a busy part of the village where shops and services are concentrated, and paths cross, so people can access the building and other facilities on foot.
- 139.** The inherent locational advantage applies to Section 88 (2) (a) of the Localism Act 2011. Moreover, it also ensures that the building can further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community in the future, and meet the test in Section 88 (2) (b).
- 140.** Chance meetings of residents inside and outside the building are impossible to quantify, but they occur daily and further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community. As such these impromptu contacts and networking opportunities are a valuable part of everyday village life and aid social cohesion.
- 141.** Daily networking opportunities are taken for granted in Wye. Chance opportunities for social interaction and contact are a particular benefit to the isolated, elderly and less mobile people in Wye and those without access to a car. Inevitably, these disadvantaged groups overlap.
- 142.** Clerks and parish councillors past and present know how busy the building could be from their personal experience as frequent users. Within the living memory of retired councillors Wye Parish Council has met in the building for more than fifty years. Over that time the Parish Council held over a thousand meetings in public. As such, the building provided a civic space and

regular meeting venue. This use for local democratic purposes furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.

- 143.** The building has served as a base for the development of community-led projects and initiatives which set out to further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community in various ways. For example, the Wye Village Design Group, Wye Millennium Project Group, Wye Parish Plan Group, the Wye Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Our Place Wye all met in the Hall, or Thomas Berry Room, and sometimes in the Chapel.
- 144.** As the base for Parish Council meetings the building enabled local democracy to function, and thus it furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 145.** In addition to its full meetings in public the Parish Council also has committees for delegated [Resources](#) and [Staffing](#) matters and leads several working groups. For example the [Flood Working Group](#), the [Planning Working Group](#), the [Highways Improvement Plan Working Group](#) and [Wye Breathes](#). All these groups exist to further aspects of the social wellbeing or interests of the local community. As do [other working groups](#) and the many active community organisations listed in APPENDIX13 (a). For example, the [Wye Village Design Group](#) Wye Parish Plan Group and Wye Future Group all held their inaugural meetings in the Hall, and met in the building many times subsequently.
- 146.** It is realistic to think that these and many other groups will need publicly accessible places in which to meet in future. This addresses the test under the Localism Act 2011 88 (2) (b).
- 147.** The [National Association of Local Councils website](#) puts Wye Parish Council's local role in its national context: '*As the first tier of local government and the closest port of call for residents' local (parish and town) councils can play a huge role in ensuring that our **communities are stronger, healthier and thriving places to live.***' Clearly, this broad field of work furthers the social wellbeing or interests of the local community. [Emphasis added].
- 148.** To stress this point, the NALC website quotes Duncan Selbie, chief executive of Public Health England, who told NALC that: "**What is clear is that local councils are indispensable to the solutions around keeping people in good health.**" Local Councils Review, November 2019 [Emphasis added].
- 149.** In November 2019, National Association of Local Councils (NALC) '*launched a new webpage on [health and wellbeing](#) to*

support one of its key policy campaigns for 2020.' NALC also published [Health and wellbeing case studies](#). This abounds with examples of the action and best practice led by parish councils.

150. In common with thousands of other town and parish councils Wye Parish Council has several long-established responsibilities, and delivers services and projects. The overarching and shared objective being that these all further the social wellbeing or interests of the local community in some way. The [Wye Revives project](#) being a recent addition to the Parish Council's work programme.

151. In November 2021 the chairman Cllr Noel Ovenden informed residents via a newsletter that *"For over a hundred years this building acted as a centre of community life in Wye. **We need to keep it in community use, to support clubs and activities and the health and wellbeing of our residents.** As a first step, the Parish Council has asked the trustees in Manchester to meet and discuss options"* Feedback from residents is strongly supportive of the Parish Council's approach. [Emphasis added].

152. From the Parish Clerk's perspective, given the increasing range of public responsibilities, projects and problems that the Parish Council must now deal with, the Clerk often needs to arrange meetings at short notice.

153. The Thomas Berry room has long been being particularly useful for these occasions. However, the high demand for meeting space in Wye and [the very limited options](#) remaining at Wye Village Hall means that the seemingly simple administrative task of booking a room is often problematic, especially for one-off meetings which are often called at short notice.

APPENDIX18 Examples of recent Parish Council invoices for room hire for meetings open to the public between 2014 – 2019.

154. The constraint on meeting space in Wye increased in November 2015 when Telereal Trillium bought Wye College and closed the Wolfson Lecture Theatre. This modern and well-equipped facility built in 1989 had a Fire Regulations capacity of 90 people, but it was demolished in 2021.

155. For example, in 2015 Ashford Borough Council had a statutory duty to organise a public hearing for the Wye Neighbourhood Plan examination, but was unable to find an available venue in Wye. Consequently, the Borough Council arranged the hearing in the relatively inaccessible Julie Rose

stadium in Kennington. This was contrary to the best practice guidance which is to hold hearings in the affected community.

APPENDIX19 Examination in Public change of venue poster issued by Ashford Borough Council, Planning Department.

- 156.** Afterwards Cllr Noel Ovenden's Parish Digest recorded in the Parish Magazine that: *'at the public hearing of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan held in December, Richard High, **the examiner, was impressed by the large turnout despite the hearing being held outside the village.** Both Ashford Borough Council and your Parish Council worked hard in an attempt to find a location, within Wye, that would meet Mr High's requirements. Unfortunately, all the usual venues were fully occupied or unsuitable. An enquiry was made with Telereal Trillium about the possible use of Wolfson Lecture Theatre – a location that historically would have been the natural venue. Sadly, the PC were informed that the buildings were now "mothballed" and as such, unable to be used.'* [Emphasis added]

APPENDIX20 Cllr Noel Ovenden's Digest for the Wye Parish Magazine January 2016 issue.

- 157.** Recent conversations with the Methodist leaders in Wye (Rev'd John Makey, Dr Geoff Chapman, Dr Paul Burnham and Mary Lambert) confirmed that the building continued to provide rooms for some 80 bookings a month regularly until lockdown. Furthermore, in exceptionally busy months the number of bookings could exceed 100 (see APPENDIX5(c)).
- 158.** Rev'd Hollands kindly assisted the Parish Council by providing the most recent, pre-COVID-19 lettings income for Wye. This totalled £6,337 in 2019 and £6,874 in 2018.
- 159.** Rev'd Hollands also confirmed that whereas most lettings were paid for, the meetings organised by Church members were not charged. This concession mainly benefitted the weekly Options Club and weekly Open House informal social drop-ins.
- 160.** These events held every Thursday and Saturday morning provided about 250 hours of contact time a year, and valuable companionship for dozens of mainly elderly and mainly single Wye residents. Few of whom also attended Sunday worship.
- 161.** Although organised by Church members, Options Club and Open House were both expressly non-religious weekly social events open to all. They were advertised as such in the monthly

Wye Parish Magazine, as APPENDIX13(b) confirms. The programme for the last full month of events and guest speakers in February 2020 was: Community Warden 'Some Tips' (6th); 'Our Kind of Music' (13th); 'John's Quiz' (20th), and finally Robert Graham's 'Kentish Poems' (27th). APPENDIX13(b) also confirms that the cost for participants was '£1.00 a week covers coffee and biscuits.' The Options Club did not charge participants for the room hire.

162. The Options Club met in the Hall for the [last time before lockdown 19th March 2020](#). The Options Club and Open House, being both advertised and run as expressly non-religious events, were non-ancillary in nature. They certainly succeeded in furthering the social wellbeing or interests of the local community, and did so between 2002 and 2020 in the case of Options Club.

163. Our Place Wye CIC is keen to re-start Options Club as it was well-liked and met an obvious community need for regular informal social contact time. However, Our Place Wye is obstructed by the lack of a suitable venue as Wye Village Hall has no availability. This point is relevant to the 'it is realistic' test under the Localism Act 2011 Section 88 (2) (b).

APPENDIX31 Our Place Wye CIC statement, March 2022

APPENDIX32 Kent Community Warden statement, March 2022

164. Options Club is a very clear example of a proven and successful format that meets a social need, but is stymied by the lack of a meeting space with a kitchen. This carries forward to the 'it is realistic' test under the Localism Act 2011 Section 88 (2) (b).

165. The Parish Council valued the high social and wellbeing benefits of these regular, but understated weekly gatherings, and gave thanks and [public recognition for this in 2017](#) as follows: *'Congratulations and many thanks to Wye's Parish Award winners this year. At the Annual Parish Meeting Social Evening the Parish Council chairman Cllr Noel Ovenden announced the winners, and thanked them for their contributions to the quality of village life and the environment.'*

'The winners are: [The late] 'Aileen Makey - for the foresight to set up the Options Club over 15 years ago. This thriving social club meets in Wye Methodist Church Hall every Thursday at 10.30 to enjoy eclectic programme of speakers and music and each other's company. Options Club welcomes newcomers, especially those living alone. Aileen was too ill to attend the event, so the presentation will made to her at home instead.'

APPENDIX21 Congratulations and thanks to Wye Parish Award winners

- 166.** During her meeting with the Parish Council to explore alternatives to the sale of the building, Rev'd Hollands made the distinction between the (many) paying users and (the very few) non-paying users. However, in the context of an ACV nomination, this monetary distinction between users does not apply.
- 167.** Regrettably, the Methodist booking secretary destroyed all the booking records before the closure announcement. However, an estimate of actual community use can still be calculated.
- 168.** The audited accounts correlate to **over a thousand hours of secular community activities per year**. All of this use furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 169.** To reiterate, the assembled evidence shows that the main secular uses by numerous community groups exceeded, by an overwhelming margin, the hours that the building was used for worship and related activities. For simplistic evaluation purposes based on the available evidence, a use ratio of 80:20 (non-ancillary/ancillary) is a realistic estimate.
- 170.** The hours of community use can be approximated by averaging the following annualised bookings income of £6,605.50 achieved across 2018 and 2019. These being audited figures kindly reported to the Parish Council by Rev'd Hollands.
- 171.** This total income figure equates to an average room hire income of £18.10 per day, including Sundays) At a known hire rate of £7 per hour this multiplies up to an annual total of 943.6 hours of community room hire, or 78.64 hours per month.
- 172.** The income received understates the actual level of community use, as Rev'd Hollands confirmed that some groups were either allowed a reduced rate, or not invoiced at all, in the case of local charities (see APPENDIX12).
- 173.** Social events led by Methodist Church members are understood not to have paid room hire charges. Regardless of any financial concessions, the actual activities that took place furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.
- 174.** Notably Options Club and Open House did not pay for their use of the building. Had they done so at the standard rate of £7 per hour they would have contributed in total about £1,750 a year. This is potential income foregone, which carries forward to

the 'it is realistic' test under the Localism Act 2011 S88 (2) (b).

175. On occasions such uses also had an opportunity cost for the church finances. For example, the Margaret Giles School of Dancing is obliged to hire Wye Village Hall for its classes on Saturday mornings as the Hall (and its piano) was always required for Open House coffee mornings at that time every week.

176. That said, and financial concessions aside, Open House meetings in the Hall furthered social wellbeing and interests of the community all year round, whereas the Margaret Giles School of Dancing only functioned in school term times.

Conclusion

177. The asset passes both tests under Section 88 (2) (a).

2. How do you anticipate that the land / building(s) will be returned to that use or put to some other main use which will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and when do you consider this will happen.

Executive summary

178. The pandemic forced the Methodist managing trustees to close the building. It remained closed throughout 2020, though not because of any decline in the community need, or anticipated fall in demand for its facilities post pandemic. Rev'd Hollands cited the reason as 'the burden on local trustees.'

179. This 'burden' is a resource issue, but not a significant obstacle. The Parish Council can resolve it with a fresh and planned approach to facilities management that will be financially sustainable and provide increased public benefits.

180. Wye Parish Council has prepared a business plan and offered repeatedly to either lease the building from TMCP at a commercial rent, or buy the building on the basis of an agreed commercial valuation. The business plan contains commercially sensitive information. [As this nomination form and appendices will become public documents, the business plan and correspondence is not appended as supporting evidence].

- 181. The Parish Council's stated aim is to return it to active use as a community centre, and to improve its range of facilities.**
- 182. By default, as the intended outcome is a fully functioning community centre it is realistic to think that it would further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.**
- 183. On this basis, Wye Parish Council is confident that although COVID-19 will remain in circulation, the risks will become more manageable within a five-year timeframe. The latent need for people to meet and take part in community life will rebound in that timeframe. This will justify a substantial capital investment in the building as an asset of community value.**
- 184. Professional research commissioned for the Our Place Wye business plan in 2015 produced strong and clear evidence of unmet need for health and social wellbeing support in Wye. In particular the older and less able members of the community.**
- 185. Local need has increased since 2015, along with the population. The legacy of the pandemic, increasing financial pressures on households, and the unknowns of a potentially protracted war in Europe are all compounding the stress on individuals and adding to the need to support social wellbeing.**
- 186. Although the timing remains problematic, it is realistic to expect that the current threats to wellbeing posed by COVID-19, war and financial pressures will subside within the next five years.**
- 187. It is also realistic to think that the suppressed elements of community life and social activities can resume safely within the same timescale of five years.**
- 188. Under new management, and with the benefit of clearly defined aims and strong infection control measures and other necessary resources in place, the building can once again further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.**
- 189. The pandemic continues to distort the level of need for community space. Thus, many residents who are clinically vulnerable continue to isolate, or avoid potentially risky indoor meetings. They are not participating in community activities in some cases from choice, or because event organisers consider the infection risk to be too high, or impracticable to mitigate.**
- 190. The [Wye Community Lunch](#) is a good example. Having operated for over four years the organisers considered it unsafe to**

open for the past two years. Despite isolated people in Wye being clearly in need of some social contact during the pandemic.

191. The effect of isolation and anxiety is certain to be harming community wellbeing. For some vulnerable and bereaved individuals that harm is likely to be great. Fortunately, Wye has some sixty established community groups and is a relatively resilient and well-connected community. For perspective and scale, Wye has some 1,092 (Band D equivalent) households.
192. The strong social networks and groups in Wye support individuals, and they have done so throughout the pandemic. They will also aid recovery and wellbeing at the community level, but crucially, many of these need facilities from which to operate.
193. Those individuals and community groups that have yet to emerge for safety reasons will once again need meeting and catering facilities. However, as the [current booking diary shows](#), Wye Village Hall is already operating at near capacity, despite the high and now rising prevalence of COVID-19 and the increasing risk of infection.
194. Although Wye Village Hall is almost fully booked it serves a limited number of mainly [regular user groups](#). These include the indoor sports and more active groups for young people and some specialist facility users, for example the Wye Arts Cinema Club.
195. The Wye Village Hall [trustees' annual report](#) for 2020 reported that 'bookings were strong' for 2021 and lists in a 'normal year' that it had twenty-one regular users of its facilities. Whereas Wye has some sixty voluntary bodies and organisations in total.

APPENDIX22 Wye Village Hall booking diary, 13th September 2021, (when COVID-19 case rates and contagion risks were low).

196. Furthermore, the constraint on meeting spaces is a long-standing problem in Wye which pre-dates the closure of the building. The closure of the Wolfson Lecture Theatre in November 2015 exacerbated an existing problem. (see APPENDIX20 and 26).
197. [The High Court ruled in 2021](#) that meetings held under the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA72) must be held in person, and in public, at a single specified geographical location. Councillors must attend in person to be recorded as being present and vote. This is significant in relation to [LGA72 Section 86 \(1\) \(c\)](#). To comply with this ruling the Parish Council needs suitable, publicly accessible premises in which to meet and carry out its duties.

Need, context and locational advantages

- 198.** The building provided meeting spaces that suited small groups and community activities that complemented the larger Wye Village Hall facilities. All of which further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community in their own way.
- 199.** Typically, the building evolved to support many of the smaller, quieter and less physical community uses in Wye. This facility also enjoys a strong locational advantage and full accessibility which served the needs of older, single and less able residents well.
- 200.** To reiterate, 'Methodism in Wye' states that: *'The site of the new chapel was at the heart of the village. Just outside was the village pump, its main water supply, now marked by a plaque. This was chosen as the central point of the village during discussions on the recently prepared village plan. The chapel could not now be ignored as a significant part of community life.'*
- 201.** Being both central and accessible on foot the building encourages community life and social interaction to flourish. In the analogous context of town centre retail footfall, the building is located in a prime site as an engine for Wye's social economy.
- 202.** As such, the building is well placed to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. The need for such a facility is heightened by the pandemic and the rapidly deteriorating financial situation.
- 203.** In summary, based on the strength of the evidence that a wide range of community social activities used the building before the pandemic, there is a clear need to retain the building for its use as a community centre. The resumption of community use is both realistic and sustainable, in both the practical and financial senses.
- 204.** The building supported a range of community uses. These uses may change to reflect changes in community needs and interests. The Parish Council views this as an opportunity to innovate and adapt and thereby continue to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community in future.
- 205.** The building was managed very simply and in much the same way for many years until its closure in 2020. Community users did not have access to free wi-fi, or the convenience of an online room booking system. Nor did the building have a website

to promote its facilities and day-to-day room availability to potential users. Instead, the booking system relied on a landline number, answerphone messages and a paper diary.

- 206.** To assist the trustees the Parish Council provided a [simple web presence](#) and published the text provided by Dr Chapman. However, a fresh and flexible approach to building management can reinvigorate the whole facility and increase its capacity and uses. By concentrating on the aim of providing community benefits more effectively, the building can, once again, further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 207.** Fortunately, with minimal adaptations and upgrades to the internal layout the building can perform this community centre role again, and do so more effectively than it achieved before the pandemic forced its closure.
- 208.** Rev'd Hollands confirmed that the repairs identified in the recent quinquennial review were costed at some £20,000 over the next five years. This figure appears to represent a maintenance backlog on this building, which is Grade II listed. The Parish Council's business plan includes a reserve and a sinking fund to ensure that future maintenance will be timely.
- 209.** The Parish Council has the option to fund this maintenance work from its existing free reserves. However, the Parish Council plans to borrow funds (subject to due process) to buy the building. The preferred route is to add the maintenance sum on top of the purchase price, and roll the backlog and refit costs into the capital repayment schedule. This will spread the cost over a long period, potentially up to fifty years (The funding mechanism is discussed in para. 250 to para. 255 under Viability (capital) below).

Viability (revenue) and outline business case

- 210. Transition, phasing and constraints:** When the pandemic eases it will release a pent-up need for a variety of non-ancillary uses for the building. These community uses would return to further, albeit not in quite the same way as before, the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 211.** Some activities, where the risk of infection can be managed at a low level, could resume as soon as the building is available to return to community use after maintenance work. The main constraints being lawful access and the time needed to bring the building back into a safe and fit condition for public use. The discussion below will expand the Parish Council's reasoning.

- 212. Financial resilience:** Developing a sustainable mixed income stream is essential for financial resilience in the long term. Wye Parish Council calculates that the fresh approach outlined below will be sufficient to cover ongoing overheads and building maintenance costs, build a reserve to meet future repair costs and improvements, employ staff, and meet loan repayments.
- 213. Cost comparator:** [Chartham Hatch Village Hall](#) provides a local comparator for income and expenditure budgeting purposes. This charity formed in 1968 and operates in a Victorian Gothic building, which is comparable in its age (built 1873) and construction to Wye Methodist Church. Albeit it was built as a village school. The [financial history](#) averaged over in the four years pre-COVID-19 is stable and it shows an average annual income of £11,660, and an average expenditure of £7,327.
- 214.** Chartham's current hourly room rate is £8 (compared to £7 per hour in Wye in 2020). However, Wye earned £6,605.50 compared to Chartham's total income of £11,660. Tellingly the trustees of Chartham managed to bank 76% more income than the trustees of Wye, having provided similar facilities and services.
- 215.** As Wye has approximately five times the population of Chartham Hatch, this marked performance differential suggests that the building in Wye has considerable latent potential.
- 216.** To put this revenue comparison in context, a total annual outgoings liability of say, £10,000 (allowing for greatly increased energy costs, but excluding loan repayments) represents less than 7% of the Parish Council's current annual precept.
- 217.** In summary, a proof of concept shows that this undertaking is needed, viable, affordable, manageable in scale and therefore realistic.
- 218. Partnership working:** The Parish Council works closely with the managing trustees of the [Wye Village Hall and Recreation Ground Charity](#), and manages the recreation ground and equipped play areas on their behalf under licence. Once the building is operational there are potential economies of scale and other benefits to gain from greater partnership working, and the two facilities have long complemented each other.
- 219. Public health:** The pandemic is not going away, so the mix of income streams outlined below assumes that COVID-19 will become endemic, with epidemic waves and spikes as new variants appear periodically. In preparation for this reality the

building will need layers of infection control measures installed, and keep them either in operation, or on standby. The Business Plan has a provision for a range of additional public health and energy conservation measures. For example, improved ventilation and heat exchanger, HEPA filters and upper air UVc.

- 220. Climate change:** This is the overarching consideration in respect of all building works, revenue costs in the operational phase and overall project resilience. The Business Plan provides for improvements in thermal efficiency and other adaptations, and has options for carbon and energy cost reductions under review. These works will require planning permission and listed building consent. Furthermore, from June 2022 changes to Building Regulations Part L and Part F will apply to these works.
- 221. Lettings:** enhancements to the established practice of licenced lettings will revitalise the building as a venue, and the space will be managed more efficiently and proactively, for community benefit. For example, the addition of public wi-fi, an integrated online booking system, active promotion in close coordination with the Wye Village Hall facilities, and contactless payment options for hirers. The Parish Council's prime aim being to offer users a wider range of modern, quality facilities, with greater capacity and flexibility for community use in the future.
- 222. The chapel:** 'Methodism in Wye' acknowledged that '*the Church proper is used much less...*' In practice, the largest and most attractive space in the building was left unused on most weekdays. Whereas the fresh approach envisaged by the Parish Council aims to change this situation and increase the earning potential of this premium space. Consequently, a significantly greater community use of this space will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 223.** From its present low base line use per week, the chapel space has the potential to transform the letting income received. If hired for an average of say thirteen chargeable hours at £10, this would add some £6,760 in income per year. This modest level of chargeable use would double the historic total letting income for the whole building. This extra use would further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community considerably.
- 224.** An annual total of an extra 676 hours of community use for the previously little used chapel could compensate in some measure for the [recent loss of the Wolfson](#) Lecture Theatre and Latin School as valuable spaces for community use.

- 225. Worship use retained:** All community uses aside, as Sundays are not usually a peak time for community activities there is the possibility of retaining a worship use alongside the extensive mix of secular community uses outlined in 5B above. The same could apply to any community centre with availability.
- 226. Leases:** would be appropriate for parts of the building to enable one, or potentially two anchor tenants to underpin the income stream and provide financial resilience. A steady and reliable income would enable the Parish Council to keep room hire rates low for community uses, and underpin cash flow. This approach would encourage more community use and further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 227. Anchor tenants:** The tenants envisaged are Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council itself, and potentially KCC Arts and Libraries. The premises costs that the Parish Council pays for its leased office (currently £6,453 per year) could instead support the building and underpin the revenue budget, as discussed above. This is additional to the letting income for community use. As a base line in the two years before the pandemic closed, the building the average actual lettings income totalled £6,605.50.
- 228. Cost savings:** the relocation of the Parish Council's office is a cash neutral reallocation within the Parish Council's budget. However there would be a clear financial advantage to KCC Libraries as [the present library premises costs £16,538](#) to run. This figure covered the fixed costs of Wye Library (rates, rent, maintenance, cleaning, energy and security) in 2019-2020. The present library premises is also a smaller and less flexible space.
- 229. Synergy:** the Parish Council's business plan is viable without the library income, but if added its co-location would increase footfall in the building significantly and this would further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

APPENDIX23 KCC Libraries Use of Libraries statistics 2019-2020

- 230.** The presence of one or two anchor tenants would complement, and extend the level of social activity and interaction in the building.
- 231.** Furthermore, public libraries qualify for ACV listing in their own right. For example, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea listed the North Kensington Library on the ground that *'the current use of the building furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and it is realistic to believe*

that the future use of the building or land will continue to further the social interests.' ([Ref: ACV/16/08348](#))

- 232.** The potential co-location of an ACV qualifying use within a building which already qualifies as an ACV can only amplify the benefits and this would further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 233.** KCC's statistics (APPENDIX 23) show that Wye Library received a total of 9,316 visits in 2019. Thus, if all that additional footfall and extra hours of community time is diverted to the building it will increase its active use overall. This will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. Alternatively, even if Wye Library remains in situ some 50m away, its proximity to the building will help to increase community use.
- 234.** A higher daily footfall through the building will also increase the number of chance social contacts made, and thereby reinforce Wye's already strong social networks and further social wellbeing or social interest of the local community.
- 235.** **Working from home (WFH):** the combination of broadband and the pandemic have opened new alternatives to commuting, and the shock of 2020 has altered the whole concept of work. WFH also has environmental and social and health benefits. Many former commuters and the self-employed are now able to spend some, or all of their time working from home. However, isolation and loneliness can be harmful to wellbeing at any age.
- 236.** Former commuters are a potential new user group for the building, with needs for social meeting spaces and new activities at different times. Whereas commuters will remain a hard-to-reach group within the community, there is now a choice.
- 237.** For example, a monthly breakfast club with guest speakers would enable those people who used to chat together every morning on a train to catch-up, and continue to make new friends and local contacts over coffee.
- 238.** In particular, this type of informal event will help newcomers to Wye who lack local contacts and opportunities to meet people. They can start to build their own network of local contacts and soon feel welcome and connected. Easy and informal contact will encourage them to take an active part in village life and this will further the social wellbeing or social interests of new and existing members of the local community.

- 239. Kitchen:** the Hall has a large and well provided kitchen. However, like the chapel this facility was under used. In recent years it did little more than provide tea making facilities. For example, making better use of this as a working kitchen could provide the weekly [Wye Community lunch](#) with the secure facilities and income that it needs to be sustainable. Over time it will reach out and benefit more people. This stability will greatly further the social wellbeing or social interests of the community. (See APPENDICES 31 and 32)
- 240.** There are further benefits as Wye Village Hall has a table seating capacity for 180, whereas the weekly Community Lunch only needs to cater for about 25 diners. Relocation will also free up the Village Hall for another group that needs the larger space.
- 241. Meeting room IT facilities hire:** The Parish Council has operated successfully on a hybrid basis from its current premises since May 2021. When the Parish Council is not in session, this IT equipment has great potential for use by other bodies as an alternative to in-person meetings.
- 242. Virtual meetings:** there is no remote meeting facility available for public use in Wye. If provided in the building it can generate further hire income to support the budget, and make better use of public money invested in the IT equipment.
- 243. Wider scope:** The Methodist Church's national standard lettings licence to occupy (11.03.2020 v5) imposed a strict condition on community use of the facilities.
- 244.** Condition (3.g) of the lettings licence prohibits any consumption of alcohol or gambling on the premises. This stops users from holding raffles, 100 Club draws, wine and cheese parties, and simple fundraisers that community groups use, typically to raise petty cash for their room hire costs. For example, the Wye Arts Cinema Club starts every film night with a raffle.
- 245.** Once released from Condition (3.g) the building can offer terms comparable to the Wye Village Hall and other community centres, and all kinds of community celebrations will be in scope. This relaxation in the hire terms will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.
- 246.** As Rev'd Hollands confirmed during the meeting in April (see APPENDIX12) the managing trustees allowed groups led by its Wye members to meet without paying room hire charges.

247. Ending this grace and favour practice will release about four hours a week for chargeable community activities. At the 2020 letting rate of £7 per hour this approach could raise annual income by at least £1,250, without any reduction in the scale of community activities in the building, and retain social benefits.

248. The Parish Council has its own room hire needs. If these meetings use the building it will raise a similar sum per year.

249. In practice, regular users of the building had their own keys and came and went without any direct involvement from either the Property Steward or the Bookings Secretary. Consequently, the relationship between hirer and community user groups was remote and transactional (see APPENDIX18 for invoice examples).

APPENDIX24 Methodist Church standard room lettings licence to occupy Document, reference 11.03.2020 v5.

Viability (capital)

250. Funding sources: To augment any available capital grants, Wye Parish Council is eligible to access low, long-term fixed rate funding from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) for capital regeneration works. This borrowing facility, is subject to PWLB rules and evidence of public support.

251. The PWLB offers fixed rate loans repayable over fifty years. Once the loan is in place, it will enable the Council to improve the structure and flexibility of the building and increase its ability to function as a vibrant and financially self-sustaining village asset.

252. As a precedent to match fund the Wye Village Hall upgrade the Parish Council (as custodian trustee) borrowed £100,000 on a fixed rate loan from PWLB to part finance the works. This initiative enjoyed strong public support, backed by consultations and policy support in the Wye Neighbourhood Plan.

253. This borrowing was necessary to compensate for the absence of any Community Infrastructure Levy scheme in the district, or s106 funding secured from housing developments.

254. The Parish Council's current business plan has structured the finance to ensure that no additional precept contribution will be required during the whole loan period. The Parish Council's £100,000 loan to complete the Wye Village Hall project set this precedent as it covered repayments without any need to raise the precept. The budget for 2022-2023 takes the same approach.

- 255.** In summary, Wye Parish Council has the necessary reserves, borrowing capability and track record to acquire, upgrade and manage this asset for community benefit.
- 256. VAT:** Subject to HMRC rules, there is potentially a further efficiency in that the Parish Council may be able to reclaim VAT on some premises repair and renovation costs. The detailed business plan will consider the options and use this tax efficient advantage where possible.
- 257. Structure:** For speed and simplicity, the Parish Council makes this ACV nomination in its capacity as a local authority and incorporated body.
- 258. Operational phase:** looking ahead, the Parish Council is mindful of the Localism Act and the day-to-day practical difficulties of managing a charitable village hall as a sole charity trustee. The choice and formation of the most appropriate structure to own and manage the building is under review.

Policy support

- 259.** The Care Act 2014 has a direct bearing, as wellbeing covers a range of outcomes, such as physical and mental and emotional wellbeing. This wide definition of wellbeing also covers participation in work, education and training and social and economic well-being, and relates to the different needs of all age groups.
- 260.** In response to an extensive community consultation the Parish Council initiated the Our Place Wye programme in 2014 and obtained funding from MHCLG as a national pilot. This social research work informed the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan, and shaped in particular 5.1 Community and wellbeing and its Policy WNP7 Community support.
- 261.** Policy WNP7 Community support states that: '*Where new housing development takes place, developer contributions through CIL and Section 106 agreements where the legal requirements in paragraphs 203 and 204 of the NPPF are met having regard to the development proposed, will be directed towards;*
- *improvements to the village hall complex,*
 - ***the provision of a day care facility for elderly residents in Wye.***
- (Emphasis added)

262. The Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan provides planning policy support for the community projects that need physical space in which to operate, and the spare capacity to enable new groups to form and develop.

263. The Our Place Wye Business Plan Logic Model – What does good look like? identified ‘*Reducing incidence of loneliness and isolation*’ as one of its [top twenty outcomes](#).

APPENDIX25 Our Place Wye Business Plan Logic Model, (approved by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, now DLUHC) Intended outcomes – What does good look like?

Research and evidence of need

264. The [broad vision of the Our Place Wye programme](#) is to develop a complementary, asset-based approach that promotes community health and wellbeing. The first aim is to promote wellbeing, and raise the quality of life for older residents, those of working age with disabilities, and their carers and families.

265. The Our Place Wye [Business Plan](#) (2015) states that: ‘*Our aims are to nurture a more inclusive, integrated community, which is more resilient and responsive to individual needs, age and social profile, and stimulates a healthy, caring and sustainable community in Wye and the surrounding areas.*’

266. The Business Plan identified a set of activities to address social, health and wellbeing deficiencies in Wye. In particular, the needs of one third of the parish population who were aged over 60 (787 people 2011 Census) Over 16 % of the population are aged over 75 (373 people) and 54 of whom are aged over 90.

267. From one-to one community research interviews the clear priority for this large demographic is an affordable community café. This is needed and prioritised partly for its nutritional benefits as these are important, but primarily as an affordable place for people to meet and be sociable, and counter loneliness.

268. Wye used to benefit from just such a facility until 2009, but lost this with the final closure of Wye College and its kitchen and dining hall. Clearly, a replacement community café located in the building will further the social wellbeing or social interests of many in the local community, and Our Place Wye CIC continues to support this aim. (See APPENDIXES 31 and 32)

269. The Business Plan identified key indicators of social and

wellbeing need, notably that over 10% of the population are widowed and a further 7% are either separated or divorced. Whereas the district average of elderly on state support is 2.5%. Wye is around 13.5%. And that just over 9% of the population report that their day-to-day activities are limited a lot by their health. Again, this correlates to the level of wellbeing across the community and it is a priority concern for the Parish Council.

270. In response to this data, and evidence from interviews Our Place Wye CIC developed activities to address needs in Phase Two, which depend on the availability of premises.

271. Therefore, use of the building as a community centre would enable a range of activities to further social wellbeing and social interests. The Our Place Wye Business Plan outlines these as follows:

272. '1. Community Cafe (food - eating & socialising)

'As highlighted by the informal study undertaken last year, there are no opportunities for people to gain access to nutritious, value for money lunches aimed at "older people". There have been a range of initiatives in the past in the village, including voluntary lunch clubs, meals delivered akin to "meals on wheels" from the local primary school, even concessionary meals for seniors provided by local public houses. Each of these has now ceased to operate.

273. *'It is firmly believed that opportunity for eating in a social context, access to nutritious, value for money meals is a crucial element of the programme. It helps reduce social isolation, encourages social inclusion, and provides a focus, and is in essence, another social space, but with a clear purpose. Many people living alone often do not go to the trouble of cooking proper meals. The report also indicated the number of people without access to cars; and frailty does not make it easy to shop by public transport. We have reviewed existing arrangements and intend to research different models and opportunities, which are realistic and cost effective.*

274. *'There is strong local support for this area of activity; many people recall that Imperial College (currently closed and disused) allowed the local community access to its dining rooms. The emerging vision of this venture is to establish a 'community cafe' (emphatically not an older people's lunch club); to strive to create a vibrant 'age inclusive' space that people wish to be part of and visit, as the heart of village life.*

275. *'NHS colleagues also take the view that the healthcare cost of managing malnourished patients was more than twice that of managing non-malnourished patients, due to increased use of healthcare resources¹³. After adjusting for age and comorbidity, malnutrition remained an independent predictor of mortality. Malnourished people saw their GP twice as often, had three times the number of hospital admissions and stayed in hospital more than three days longer than those who were well nourished.'*

276. Our Place Wye provided a [weekly Community Lunch](#) for a capacity of 24 residents until lockdown in 2020. The risk to elderly residents prevented it from restarting until 16th March 2022.

277. Although the Community Lunch was highly successful and much appreciated by the elderly residents for over four years, the project is dependent on the availability of suitable premises. Crucially the Community Lunch needs access to a good kitchen if it is to reopen as a safe and reliable facility that furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

278. Our Place Wye is also anxious to re-start the successful Options Club, but again, it lacks a suitable venue. The Village Hall has no availability. (See APPENDIXES 31 and 32).

279. 3. Community Hub (Information / Information technology)

'Currently the [branch library provides some aspects](#) but is severely constrained by space. The library has been a keen partner to examine what might be possible; this is closely aligned with its own future development. The emerging vision is to explore how to draw together the existing programmes of support, and re-shape the current facilities to promote more digital inclusion amongst older people.'

KCC Arts and Libraries

280. The Parish Council has discussed the issue of premises with KCC Arts and Libraries at intervals over the past 25 years. Most recently in 2019. The reason being that the KCC rents its library premises in Wye and keeps its property portfolio under review.

281. The following discussion is for information and does not form part of the Parish Council's business plan.

282. These discussions revealed that the lease is expensive per square foot relative to other rented libraries in Kent, and the

space is too small to enable provide a range of modern library services. Space for IT access is also severely constrained. The Parish Council is acutely aware of the rising cost pressures on KCC's budget and is most anxious to help to retain a library in the centre of Wye, and offer an improved range of modern services.

283. KCC has remained open and interested to the principle of shared premises in a community centre in Wye, confirmed most recently in the context of access and re-use of Wye College.

284. The option to relocate Wye Library to the building would provide social benefits as a meeting place during and out of library hours, a larger and more flexible facility for the community. Relocation would also provide potentially lower rent costs for KCC for a larger and more flexible space, with the added benefit of better natural light for reading as the present library faces north.

285. While the option of this partnership is speculative (**and commercially sensitive**), it is based on the solid evidence of the Parish Council's previous engagements and discussions with KCC managers, officers and property advisers over the past 25 years.

286. Relocation of the library would enable the present library building to be repurposed. It could revert to residential use, and provide an additional ground floor home in the centre of Wye. Accessible accommodation of this size is very scarce in Wye.

287. Although constrained currently by the lack of space in normal times Wye Library is popular and well used. In September 2019 it [increased its opening hours](#) by ten per week. Within its space constraints it provides events and activities that further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

288. These community activities include weekly [Storytime](#), [Rhyme Time](#) for under 5s, Digital Dens meetings, and quarterly [Hi-Kent drop-ins for the hearing impaired](#). These groups were suspended as a COVID-10 safety measure, and Talk Time for elderly people and Hi-Kent have not restarted.

289. In September 2021 KCC stated that it is '[slowly reintroducing events and activities](#) at some of our libraries where possible.' However, the lack of space was a severe constraint in Wye Library pre-pandemic and it remains so.

290. Co-location of the Wye Library in the building would provide it with a larger and more flexible multi-purpose space, suitable for a wider range of activities than its present site permits.

291. Those people who have been most disadvantaged by COVID-19 and most isolated by lockdowns and the loss of daily social contact could gain the most from the co-location of the Wye Library. The range of services would reach more people, and further the social wellbeing or social interests of the community.

Other community activities and unmet space needs

292. In January 2021 the Parish Council responded to a request from Ashford Borough Council for a paper to justify the retention of the Latin School for community use. The following discussion is also provided for information and it does not form part of the Parish Council's business plan.

293. In January 2021 Ashford Borough Council withdrew its support for the retention of the Latin School for community use and did not defend its Planning Committee's decision at appeal. Consequently, the community of Wye is losing that valuable 50m² historic building to an exclusive private residential use.

294. The planned replacement for the Latin School is a 'Heritage Centre' of some 75m². This change of location will, at best, make little difference to the status quo in terms of community space availability. Furthermore, the timing of this relocation, booking arrangements, the terms of use, hire costs and any other constraints on users are all unknown factors. The managing body does not exist, so the governing memorandum and articles and shareholder structure remains undefined.

295. Given the continuing uncertainty regarding the relocation of the Heritage Centre and any community use that may be permitted and the established constraints on the remaining meeting spaces in Wye, there is an even more compelling case for retaining the former Methodist Church in community use.

296. Some possible uses for the building are described in the three extracts from the Executive Summary, Uses of the Latin School in Parish Council stewardship (January 2021) as follows:

297. **3.** *'Given the Latin School's central location and ease of access, the range of community uses to which it could be put are legion, even with restrictions on type and hours of use. The likely users would include: the PC, both as an office and for face-to-face engagement with residents; the community support group Our Place Wye (OPW); community groups; and possibly a Visitors Centre.'*

298. **4.** *Pre-COVID19 the Village Hall was fully booked during the week, and the two other facilities, the Methodist Hall and the church, were equally busy. Demand for community space will rise proportionally with the expected population expansion. Post COVID19 demand for greater 'localness' is also likely to increase demand.'*

299. **28.** *Methodist Hall. The Methodist Hall houses 5 rooms: the Thomas Berry Meeting Room (on first floor), (capacity 15), The Worship Room, (60), the Vestry and Garden Room (10), the Small Fellowship Room (10), and the Wesley Activities Room (30). There are coffee facilities and an en-suite kitchen. The Methodist hall facilities between them take over 80 meetings per month.'*

APPENDIX26 Wye Community use of the Latin School December 2020

300. The Latin School paper identified several community uses for this facility that are either current, or occurred in the recent past. This shows a clear need for additional space at a time in December 2020 when the Methodist Church was closed.

301. Crucially the paper presumed that the Methodist Church would reopen when it became safe to do so. (see APPENDIX10).

302. The case made for the Latin School can be reapplied to reinforce the case made above for the return of the Methodist Church building to a community centre role. This use will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

Conclusion

303. **In light of the evidence, it is realistic to think that the:**

- a) actual past community use;**
- b) continuing need for community facilities in future;**
- c) increasing population of Wye;**
- d) indications of latent potential to increase community use;**
- e) viability and robust business plan;**
- f) reliability of cash flow and fall-back funding from reserves;**
- g) reassurance of the precept to cover unforeseen liabilities;**
- h) ability of the nominating body to deliver this outcome;**
- i) timeframe over five years is realistic;**
- j) building is well placed to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community in the future.**

Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the nominated asset passes both tests under Section 88 (2) (a) and Section 88 (2) (b) of the Localism Act 2011.

Section C: Submitting this nomination

C1 Signature

By signing your name here you are confirming that the contents of this form and the documents enclosed are correct, to the best of your knowledge and belief.

I am duly authorised to sign on behalf of the nominating organisation –

Signature

Katherine Stephens

C2 Where to send this form

You can submit this Community Nomination Form:-

By post to: Legal and Democratic Services
Ashford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Tannery Lane
Ashford TN23 1PL

If any further information is required the Council will contact you by writing to you or emailing you at the contact details you have provided in the Nomination Form

Any Reference to “Regulation” or “Reg” is to the Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012 and any reference to the “Act” is to the Localism Act 2011

Wye Methodist Church

Advice

I am asked to advise on the refusal by Ashford BC (“the Council”) to list Wye Methodist Church (including the hall, garden and car park) (“the Church”) in response to a nomination by Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council (“the Parish Council”). The reasons for the refusal set out in the Council’s delegated report prepared by Mr. McBride sought to follow the decision of Judge Lane in the General Conference of the New Church v Bristol City Council CR/2014/0013 (“the New Church case”). The Church was not listed because it was considered that it failed the test in section 88(2)(a) of the Localism Act 2011 which requires that “there is a time in the recent past when an actual use of the Church or other land that was not an ancillary use furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community.” In consequence it was considered that it did not have to be determined whether the test in section 88(2)(b) was satisfied.

My view is that Judge Lane was wrong in the New Church case if it is taken to mean that a place of worship can never be listed as an ACV. I consider that the level of use of the Church for community events as opposed to events for members of the congregation is such that the Church clearly qualifies as an ACV. My reasons for forming this view are set out more fully below.

1. Nomination - the nomination made in October 2021 contains a detailed and lengthy history of the use of the Church. It was constructed in 1869 and has been in continuous use until it was closed in March 2020 due to the covid pandemic. It was subsequently decided in October 2020 that it would cease to be used for worship and would be sold. It originally comprised a chapel and an adjacent hall with a garden and parking spaces. In 1980/1981 the place of worship was changed from a rectangle shape to an octagon and the area was reduced. There was added to this an atrium, additional meeting rooms, kitchen and new stairs leading to the newly created Thomas Berry mezzanine room on the first floor. The instructions to the architects were to increase the community space (paras 9/10). At the same time the pews were replaced by a fewer number of chairs with a view to assisting that aim (para. 76).

The congregation has never been large. It reached a peak in the 1980s with a congregation of forty in 1984. At that time there would be a Sunday service at 6.30 pm in the chapel; a prayer meeting on Wednesdays at 1.30 pm; and a Bible study class on a Sunday evening at 8.00 pm (para. 29). By 2004 the average congregation had reduced to thirteen and

by 2020 it was seven (para. 30). The religious use of the Church was put at 2 to 4 hours per week (para. 28).

In contrast the community use of the Church has continued to be strong. The number of meetings held at the Church has varied between 60 and 100 a month over the ten years prior to the closure (paras 4, 23 and 102). It is estimated that in the five years prior to covid the Parish Council held 795 meetings at the Church. The Options Club has met regularly for fifteen years at the Church on a Thursday morning at 10.30. Open House is another informal social pop in group that has met in recent years at the Church. For twelve years a pilates group has had three one hour sessions a week at the Church. Dancing classes have taken place at the Church for many years for seven hours a week until the Church was closed due to covid. The Brownies used to meet in the hall. More detail is provided in Appendix 13 to the nomination supported by evidence of the publicity for the various meetings. It has been calculated from the fees received for hiring the Church that over 1000 hours of meetings took place annually at the Church. It meets a real need in the locality as there is no additional capacity at the village hall. The closure of the Wolfson Lecture Theatre and its demolition in 2011 removed a much needed meeting place in Wye (paras 103 and 123 and Appendix 20).

The history recited in the nomination shows a decline in numbers using the church for worship and an increase in the use by the local community. The proportions have been put at 80:20 (para. 5 and see paras 59 and 80).

2. ACV regime – the reason for the introduction of the ACV regime is well known. It was stated briefly in the ACV Policy Statement issued by the DCLG in September 2011 (“the Policy Statement”) that “These provisions give communities a right to identify a building or other land that they believe to be of importance to their community’s social well-being. The aim is that, if the asset comes up for sale, then they will be given a fair chance to make a bid to buy it on the open market.” A similar explanation was provided in the Ministerial Foreword to the DCLG ACV non statutory Advice issued in October 2011 which was cited in full by Sharp LJ in *Banner Homes Limited v St. Albans City and District Council* EWCA Civ 1187 at paragraph 8.

A reading of the nomination of the Church will very easily explain why it is considered that that rationale applies to the Church. The history shows it to be akin to a village hall or community centre which is the manner in which it was described in 2016 by Dr. Chapman, Wye Methodist Church Property Steward for thirty years until 2020 (para. 22 and Appendix 5). Dr. Chapman confirmed that “it is not unusual for us to host between 60 and 100 meetings per month with up to seven on a given day” (para. 25 and Appendix 5b).

This is further corroborated by Dr. Burnham, a lifelong Methodist circuit preacher and also a former Wye Methodist Church Property Steward who stated that ‘The Wesley Room, and to a lesser extent the Thomas Berry Room, were used almost every day of the week for community activities, including Parish Council committees and exhibitions.’ (The History of

Methodism in Wye (1810-2020) (extracts: page 1 Appendix 8 b.) Dr. Burnham also stated that ‘Wye Methodist Church has continued active community involvement, for example, as a valuable weatherproof base for the annual Christmas Street Party and as a base for village tidying sessions of Wye Ground Force.’ (extracts: page 2 Appendix 8 b.)

To qualify as an Asset of Community Value (“ACV”) two statutory conditions must be satisfied. These are contained in section 88(1) and (2) and which applies depends on whether there is an actual community use of the nominated asset at the time of the nomination or whether such use was in the recent past. In this case the Church has been shut since March 2020 and so it is the two conditions in section 88(2) which apply. This sub-section provides:-

“For the purposes of this Chapter but subject to regulations under subsection (3), a building or other land in a local authority’s area that is not land of community value as a result of subsection (1) is land of community value if in the opinion of the local authority—

(a) there is a time in the recent past when an actual use of the building or other land that was not an ancillary use furthered the social wellbeing or interests of the local community, and

(b) it is realistic to think that there is a time in the next five years when there could be non-ancillary use of the building or other land that would further (whether or not in the same way as before) the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.”

In the context of this matter the point to highlight is that the tests are focused on the use of the nominated asset and not the characterisation, type or description of that asset. This is a point made by Upper Tribunal Judge Levenson in *Admiral Taverns v Cheshire West v Chester Council* [2018] UKUT 15 (AAC) when he stated:

“21. It was in this context that the First-tier Tribunal commented that rather than statutory definitions of types of premises for the purposes of the 1954 Act, the 2011 Act “has (with limited exceptions) defined premises by their social consequences rather than their uses”. This formulation is misleading – what is relevant is the social consequences of particular uses. However, despite the infelicitous wording, I agree with the conclusion of the First-tier Tribunal. The purposes of the relevant provisions of the 1954 Act (protecting the commercial interests of tenants) and those of the 2011 Act (protecting the social interests of the community) are totally different; the statutory language is different and serves different purposes; the issue was not whether The Farndon Arms was a pub or a restaurant but whether the listing provisions of the 2011 Act were satisfied, and there is no suggestion that the Court of Appeal in *Taylor v Courage Limited* intended to do anything other than apply the precise statutory wording of the 1954 Act for a very specific purpose.”

This passage serves to emphasise the importance of the reason for and the context of the legislation in construing statutory wording. It is also material in the context of this case that it is irrelevant who is the owner. There is no prescribed list of owners whose land or buildings cannot be listed as an ACV. In particular land or buildings owned by a charity can be

listed if the statutory requirements are satisfied. Further it does not matter whether the use of the land or building is paid for or provided voluntarily. Use which is paid for will qualify just as use which is not.

There are only two sections of the ACV regime which are concerned with the type or description of the asset.

(i) Assets which are excluded from the ACV regime - the first is in determining a building or other land which is excluded from being land of community value (reg. 3 of the Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012 (“the 2012 Regulations”) and Schedule 1). In the Policy Statement it was stated that “We recognise that there are some categories of land that should be excluded from being listed.” These are specified in Schedule 1 to the 2012 Regulations. There are three types of building and land described in that Schedule which cannot be listed as ACV.

Importantly places of worship are not included on that list of excluded assets. If such places of worship can never be listed as an ACV it would be expected that they would be referred to in Schedule 1 because that is the only means by which specific types of assets can be excluded from the operation of the ACV regime. The omission of places of worship from the list of excluded assets indicates a deliberate intention with the inevitable consequence that the ACV regime will apply to places of worship as with other assets. In turn this means that determining whether a place of worship can be listed as an ACV will depend on the application of the two relevant statutory tests as with other nominated assets. This point was made by Judge Warren in *Firoka (Oxford United Stadium) Limited and Firoka (Oxford) Limited v Oxford City Council* CR/2013/0010 when it was unsuccessfully contended that the ACV regime did not apply to stadia (paragraphs 6 and 7).

This also means that there is no provision applicable to places of worship equivalent to paragraph 1(5) of Schedule 1 of the 2012 Regulations which deals with a building which is partly used as a residence. It is only needed because of the exclusion of residences. If it was intended that places of worship are to be treated in the same manner as residences then it is expected that a similar provision would have been included in relation to places of worship.

(ii) exclusion from operation of moratorium provisions - the second section of the ACV regime that may involve the description or type of an asset is those disposals which are not subject to the moratorium provisions and so can be carried through without any delay. These are set out in section 95(5) and Schedule 3 to the 2012 Regulations. Some of these disposals are defined by reference to the type of asset which is the subject of the disposal.

It is highly relevant to this issue that in paragraph 12 of Schedule 3 a disposal of a church pursuant to a scheme under Part 6 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 is not subject to the moratorium provisions. There would be no need for such a provision if places of worship cannot qualify as an ACV. Schedule 3 only applies to assets which can qualify as an ACV. In consequence this strongly indicates that places of worship can be listed as an ACV otherwise such a provision would be unnecessary and meaningless.

There is a very full explanation in paragraph 4.19 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the 2012 Regulations (“the Explanatory Memorandum”) as to why paragraph 12 of Schedule 3 was included in the list of disposal not subject to the moratorium provisions:

“Paragraph 12 – disposal of a closed Church of England church. A Measure is legislation of the General Synod of the Church of England which, if approved by each House of Parliament, receives Royal Assent and becomes part of the law of England. Part 6 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (“the 2011 Measure”) is entitled “Buildings Closed For Regular Public Worship” and sets out a lengthy process for closing a church and deciding what to do with the building and land thereafter. These provisions, coming into force on 1st July 2012, consolidate and replace the previous similar provisions in Part 3 of the Pastoral Measure 1983, which the 2011 Measure repeals. The procedure under the 2011 Measure would usually take considerably longer than six months, including local and national consultation, and possibly also a public hearing and appeal to the Privy Council. The building and land may technically change ownership within the Church of England more than once during this process, entailing initially transfer to the Diocesan Board of Finance then again to the Church Commissioners. The latter will authorise any agreed new use and draw up a draft pastoral scheme (with further consultation), and eventually sell or lease the building and land for the agreed purpose. If no future use can be agreed through this process, the building will either be demolished or (if architecturally or historically significant) transferred to the Churches Conservation Trust which will maintain and preserve it.”

Then further on in paragraph 9.6 of the Explanatory Memorandum it states for the reason for exempting this type of asset:

“Paragraph 12: Part 6 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 requires the responsible Church of England bodies to engage the community in future uses for a closed church. These requirements are considered sufficient to ensure the community has a satisfactory say and the chance to take a stake in the future of the building, so the moratorium provisions would be an unnecessary additional burden.”

To my mind a reading of these passages explaining the exemption of places of worship for which the Church of England is responsible forcefully emphasises that such places of worship can qualify as an ACV. There would be no need to exempt them from the moratorium provisions if they could not as those moratorium provisions apply only to properties which have been listed as an ACV.

In the second passage from paragraph 9.6 it is very noticeable that reference is made to the requirement that the Church of England has “to engage the community in future uses for a closed church”. This protection for the local community is akin to that provided in the ACV regime and justifies the specific exemption. In contrast there is no such similar protection for the local community in respect of places of worship which are not the responsibility of the Church of England such as the Church. The absence of such protection means that it is

important that the ACV regime should apply which is why paragraph 12 of Schedule is limited in scope to places of worship which have that equivalent protection.

It is relevant to this matter that even if an exemption from the moratorium provisions applies to a disposal that does not mean that the asset is removed from the ACV list. Notwithstanding the completion of the disposal the asset will remain on the ACV list and if by the time of a proposed subsequent disposal it has ceased to qualify for the exemption then the operation of the moratorium provisions will be triggered.

Once listed as an ACV the operation of the moratorium provisions are well known and do not need to be spelt out in this advice. The listing will last for five years.

3. The New Church case – the decision by Ashford BC to refuse to add the Church to the ACV list was based on following and applying the New Church case. In consequence that decision needs to be considered separately. It is not a binding decision as it is a decision of the First-tier Tribunal and so does not have to be followed. Further it is a decision in which only the land owner was represented by counsel and Bristol City Council did not play a part in the hearing. The nominator was not represented. In consequence Judge Lane stated that he was cautious about making any definitive finding (para. 15). Due to those factors to place reliance on the decision in other cases is not in my view appropriate and can lead to a decision based on an incorrect understanding of the law.

(i) facts – there is one similarity between the New Church case and this matter. The congregation had fallen over time. In the New Church case there were three regular members and four others who attended less regularly (para. 6). Similarly in Wye the size of the normal congregation had fallen from an average of thirteen in 2004 to seven members by October 2020 (para. 32). However, there is also a striking difference. In contrast to the Church there was little community use of the property in the New Church case (para. 7). Further there was no interest from local or community bodies nor any offer to purchase it (para. 10).

(ii) nominator – in this case the nominator is the Parish Council whose publicly stated aim is to purchase the Church to be used by the local community. In contrast in the New Church case the nominator was a body set up to prevent the area being developed and for it to remain “a green oasis” (para. 11).

(iii) religious worship – Judge Lane was persuaded that the expression “social wellbeing and social interests of the community” in section 88 “does not encompass religious observances in a church, mosque or synagogue etc.” (para. 15). He was persuaded by the absence of any reference to religion in the list of interests in section 88(6) which come within the phrase “social interests”. This absence he considered to be significant (para. 14).

What the learned judge did not discuss is whether even if religious worship does not fall within the description of a social interest it can further the social wellbeing of a local community. The reference to both wellbeing and interests indicates that they are not considered to be the same. There is nothing in the ACV regime or the ACV statutory appeals to suggest that social wellbeing must comprise one or more social interests rather it is an

independent phrase. A qualifying use may further social wellbeing but not further a social interest. Even if the point about religion not appearing in the list of social interests is correct that is not conclusive. Many would not describe religious worship as an interest and consider it inappropriate to be included in such a list. In any event the list in section 88(6) is not exhaustive. In my view the omission from the list of social interests does not justify the significance attached to it by the learned judge. It is in any event difficult to accept that religious use of a place of worship cannot further social wellbeing. For many regardless of which faith it does and is intended to contribute to social wellbeing.

Further it is very unfortunate that there was in this context no argument before, or discussion by, the learned judge regarding the list of excluded assets contained in Schedule 1 from which places of worship are very noticeably omitted (see section 2(i) above). In my view real significance is to be attached to that omission. Nor is there any argument or discussion regarding the inclusion of churches in paragraph 12 of Schedule 3 avoiding the operation of the moratorium provisions (again see discussion in section 2(ii) above). Again that bears real significance in this context. Both points in my view point unanswerably to places of worship being capable of qualifying as an ACV.

(iv) particular nature of religion – to justify treating religion differently reliance was placed on religion being a protected characteristic (para. 14 - section 4 and 10 Equality Act 2010 and article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms). The difficulty facing this argument is that if religious use is to be treated as a discrete and different use the route by which this could have been achieved in the ACV regime is by adding places of worship to the list of excluded properties in Schedule 1 of the 2012 Regulations and that was deliberately not taken. The omission argues strongly that religion is not being treated as a discrete use. In any event it is hard to follow why the protection of religion and belief should cause the ACV regime never to apply to places of worship.

(v) non-ancillary community use – the learned judge allowed that a place of worship will fall within section 88 if there is some other non-ancillary use of the place of worship that furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community (para. 15). However, the activities carried on in that church such as brownies and mothers and babies meetings were not considered by the learned judge to be non-ancillary (para. 24). This was explained as being because the primary use of the church was still as a church and not a community or social centre (para. 23). The other uses did not have a more than ancillary character because they “were disparate, largely ad hoc and even before closure had dwindled to the point where only one group was using the church on a regular basis.” In this respect the learned judge stated that “the context is all” (para. 22). That description of the use of the church in the New Church case is sharply different to the use of the Church which has been described as a community centre. Even if the basic point in the New Church case is correct, which I do not consider that it is, this difference in the use of the two churches is crucial and should result in a different outcome.

(vi) future second condition – section 88(2)(b) was held not to be satisfied as there were no proposed uses which could fund the maintenance of the building (para. 27). This would appear to be correct and so removing the building from the ACV list was the proper outcome and so had not needed the discussion with regard to the first statutory condition. The decision in the New Church case was undoubtedly correct but the general dicta was not in my view. Again there is a sharp difference between that case and this as regards the possible future use of the Church.

4. Reasons for refusal to list – having set out the main parts of the nomination and recited the judgment of Judge Lane in the New Church case in his report Mr. McBride then stated on page 40 that the nominator needed to show that the main use of the Church is as a community centre and the community activities were “intrinsic to, essential to, part and parcel of etc.” that main use and that that use furthered the social wellbeing and social interests of the local community. This approach in my view is not the correct one as discussed in section 8 below.

At page 41 it is stated that the activities detailed in the nomination would be characterised as secular/community events associated with the main use of the building as a community centre but not as a place of worship.

However, the report goes on to state that the frequency of the secular/community events as compared to religious events is an inappropriate way to ascertain the primary use of the church building. It is considered likely that the number of religious services will be outnumbered and this will not convert the main use of the premises from a place of worship to a community centre.

The report then recites the important factors which it considers should be taken into account as being:-

- (i) the nominated building is a church;
- (ii) erected in 1869 and has until March 2020 been operated continuously as a place of worship.
- (iii) The owners of the Church are the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (“the Trustees”) who wish to sell because of the financial burden. The e-mail sent on 15th February 2021 and the letter dated 28th February 2022 from the Reverend Holland are then quoted. The diminishing congregation was the reason for the closure of the Church.
- (iv) The Church has been managed and maintained by the Methodist Church.
- (v) The religious principles of the Methodist Church limited the nature of events for which the Church can be hired.
- (vi) On rare occasions (and only one instance is recorded) when there were clashes religious events took precedence over secular events.

- (vii) Secular events attracted a fee but religious events did not.
- (viii) Activities such as the Sunday School, Church Youth Club and ecumenical meetings were part of the religious use of the Church though the first two activities referred to ceased a number of years ago.

Mr. McBride concluded from these factors that the dominant main use of the nominated building was as a place of worship and that following the New Church case this was not intended to fall within the scope of uses that further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. This is allowing the decision as to whether or not to list as an ACV to be determined by the type or description of the asset rather than the use of that asset.

The factors set out by Mr. McBride are in the main not factors which are concerned with the use of the Church which is the focus of the ACV regime. Ownership and responsibility for maintenance are not factors which are relevant to determination of the first statutory condition. The reason for the sale although covered in detail is not in my view material.

He considered that to list the Church would open up the possibility of the ACV listing of other places of worship and that this would be undesirable. If the use of the place of worship satisfies the first statutory condition then it is not readily apparent why this should be considered undesirable. This and the focus of the factors he considered important indicates the adoption of an approach which is inconsistent with the proper application of the ACV regime.

5. Social wellbeing – a key element in this matter is what is meant by the phrase “social wellbeing”. Although social wellbeing is a phrase used in other pieces of legislation it has no specific definition. In *Earl Percy’s Appointed Fund v Hounslow LBC* CR.2016.0007 Judge Jacqueline Findlay stated at paragraph 34 that “The phrases “social wellbeing”, “social interests” and “local community” are not defined in the Act. I take the approach that they must be given their natural meaning in the English language.”

There have been attempts to provide some guidance in other contexts. *IRC v Baddeley* [1955] AC 572 concerned a trust for the religious, social and physical wellbeing of Methodists and prospective Methodists. In the House of Lords it was held that this covered activities which would not necessarily be charitable and included running community centres. The term “social wellbeing” was considered to be very wide in scope and including activities which were not charitable so the trusts could not be charitable.

Viscount Simonds having stated at page 585 that there were not three separate trust objectives but one then went on to state at page 586 that:

“My Lords, I do not think it would be possible to use language more comprehensive and more vague. I must dissent from the suggestion that a narrow meaning must be ascribed to the word "social": on the contrary, I find in its use confirmation of the impression that the whole provision makes upon me, that its purpose is to establish what is well enough called a

community centre in which social intercourse and discreet festivity may go hand in hand with religious observance and instruction.”

Lord Tucker stated at page 613 that “the words which, in my view, create the difficulty are “the promotion of social well-being.” This is an extremely vague phrase which may have different meanings to different minds and may include things considered by some, but not by others, to be advantageous. It would appear to cover many of the activities of the so-called “welfare State” and to include material benefits and advantages which have little or no relation to social ethics or good citizenship, concepts which are themselves not easily definable.”

Lastly Lord Somervell stated at page 615 that:

“The word “well-being,” though qualified by “religious” as well as “social and physical,” means primarily, in my opinion, a happy or contented state. Social well-being would be promoted when people were happy together - an important factor in institutional life. Physical well-being is promoted by exercise or recreation and the health and contentment which normally follow. Social training is an ambiguous expression and may well be too vague. Its meaning to me is training in social behaviour, in manners. I think, therefore, that these words entitle the trustees to run a social centre in the ordinary sense for the Methodists and prospective Methodists as set out in the deed.”

These dicta indicate that “social wellbeing” has an extremely wide but uncertain meaning which their Lordships were cautious in formulating. In consequence the context in which the phrase is being considered will be important.

A similar but not identical phrase to “social wellbeing” is “social welfare” which is used in some statutes. In particular it has been considered in rating cases as there has been rating relief for non-profit making organisations whose objects are charitable or otherwise for the advancement of social welfare. This phrase was considered by the Court of Appeal in the *Trustees of the National Debt Friendly Society v Skegness UDC* [1957] 2 QB 573 and Parker LJ reading the judgment of the court tackled the meaning of the phrase. He stated at page 581:

“What, then, is meant by “social welfare”? “Welfare,” we think, denotes a state of being well, whether in the physical, mental or material sense. What the word “social” adds is far from clear, but in this context we should have thought that, prima facie, it meant the well-being of individuals as members of society. The expression “social welfare,” therefore, is very wide and very vague. As Lord Tucker said in *Inland, Revenue Commissioners v. Baddeley*, in considering the phrase “the promotion of social well-being”: “This is an extremely vague phrase which may have different meanings to different minds and may include things considered by some, but not by others, to be advantageous. It would appear to cover many of the activities of the so-called ‘welfare State’ and to include material benefits and advantages which have little or no relation to social ethics or good citizenship, concepts which are themselves not easily definable. I find it impossible to construe these trusts in such a way as to restrict the operation of this language to promoting or inculcating ‘those standards of

secular conduct and behaviour ... expected of a good neighbour and a good citizen' as the Court of Appeal have done." Unless, therefore, some restriction can be implied from the context, we should have thought that the provision of benefits which tends directly to improve the health or conditions of life of individuals comes prima facie within the expression "social welfare."

This dicta would appear to cover the consequences of religious use just as well as other community uses. Religious use is not limited to taking part in services but extends among other things to the advancement of principles for life, socialising, education, opportunities for volunteering, counselling and the resolution of disputes.

On appeal to the House of Lords reported at [1959] AC 293 there was more caution in setting out the meaning. Lord MacDermott stated at page 314:

"My Lords, "social welfare" is, on any view, a wide and difficult expression. The Court of Appeal regarded "welfare" as denoting a "state of being well, whether in the physical, mental or material sense" and, founding on what Lord Tucker said in *Inland Revenue Commissioners v. Baddeley*, respecting the phrase "the promotion of social well-being," thought that, apart from any restriction to be implied from the context, "the provision of benefits which tends directly to improve the health or conditions of life of individuals comes prima facie within the expression 'social welfare.'" On consideration I must confess to having some doubt as to whether that conclusion may not go too far. Though I am not sure that this expression has as yet gained a settled primary sense, I would hesitate to regard it as synonymous with "social well-being." That phrase may be employed to describe a state of comfort and plenty, but "social welfare" seems to me to savour, at present anyway, more of those needs of the community which, as a matter of social ethics, ought to be met in the attainment of some acceptable standard."

Later in *Valuation Commissioners for Northern Ireland v Lurgan BC* [1968] NI 104 Lord MacDermott stated that he was still inclined to the view he expressed in the *National Deposit Friendly Society* case and that "social welfare" signifies more than "social wellbeing" but did not in that case feel the need to be drawn into a discussion of the point.

Whilst Lord Denning in the *National Deposit Friendly Society* case stated at pages 322/323:

"The words "social welfare" themselves also connote, to my mind, the concept of public benefit. These words comprehend many objects which are beneficial to the community but are not charitable according to the somewhat limited interpretation given in the charity cases. A person is commonly said to be engaged in "social welfare" when he is engaged in doing good for others who are in need - in the sense that he does it, not for personal or private reasons - not because they are relatives or friends of his - but because they are members of the community or of a portion of it who need help. The need may not be due to poverty. It may be due to the conditions of life of the persons concerned. They are usually people who are under a disadvantage compared to others more favourably placed - boys who need a

youth club instead of running on the streets - people of small means who are given holidays in a home which they could not otherwise afford - working men who need a club where they can spend their leisure - and so forth. If a person is engaged in improving the conditions of life of others who are so placed as to be in need, he is engaged in "social welfare." But people who are engaged in improving their own conditions of life are not engaged in social welfare. If an organisation is formed by public-spirited folk with the object of providing a boys' club - or a room for a women's institute - it is no doubt concerned with the advancement of social welfare: but if it is formed by a group of persons with the object of providing a social club for their own enjoyment or recreation, it is not. The difference between the two is that the main objects of the one are directed to the public benefit, whereas the others are not."

Just before this House of Lords decision the Court of Appeal considered the phrase in *Berry v St. Marylebone* [1958] Ch. 406 and Romer LJ giving the judgment of the court in a lengthy passage sought to draw from the Court of Appeal judgment in the *National Deposit Friendly Society* case supra more detailed guidance as to the meaning of the phrase. At pages 418/420 he stated:

"If, then, the society is unable to show that its first object is concerned with the advancement of religion or education, it can only succeed in this appeal if it establishes that such object is wholly concerned with the advancement of social welfare. This aspect of section 8 was considered by this court in *National Deposit Friendly Society Trustees v. Skegness Urban District Council*. The facts of that case had little in common with those in the present case and it is unnecessary therefore to state them. Certain points do, however, emerge from the judgment of the court: (1) Prima facie, the expression "social welfare" means the well-being (whether in the physical, mental or material sense) of individuals as members of society. (2) The provision of benefits which tends directly to improve the health or conditions of life of individuals comes prima facie within the expression "social welfare." (3) The expression does not necessarily involve the presence of an eleemosynary element. (4) In order to qualify under this part of the section, an organization must have as its object the advancement of social welfare as an end in itself or for its own sake; and, although "concerned" is a wide word, it cannot be read as bringing in as an object something which is incidental. (5) The persons to be benefited and the source of the benefits are pertinent considerations. (6) Inasmuch as the provision in question is an exemption from rates at the expense of the general body of ratepayers, it would be right, in a doubtful case, to give the words "or otherwise concerned with the advancement of social welfare" a restricted meaning.

It is quite clear that the court was not attempting an exhaustive or precise definition of these words. It was indicating in a general way what, in its view, they mean and prescribing tests which might usefully be applied to the facts of any given case. The reference in the judgment to welfare denoting a state of "being well, whether in the physical, mental or material sense" was not intended necessarily to exclude the idea of well-being in a spiritual or emotional sense, for example, happiness or ethical behaviour. Nor did the court, in our

judgment, when referring to "the provision of benefits which tends directly to improve the health or conditions of life of individuals" mean that the provision of benefits, which tended indirectly to produce those results, cannot qualify under the section; for example, it might well be that an organization, the main object of which was concerned with the free training of girls who desired to take up nursing or midwifery as a profession, could qualify, notwithstanding that there was no direct benefit to society during their period of training. We venture to make these observations because a somewhat too rigid approach to the judgment in the *National Deposit Friendly Society* case seemed to be manifested in some of the arguments which were addressed to us."

Again this emphasises that the phrase has a wide and uncertain meaning but is more limited than "social wellbeing" because it must have a public element. As the ACV regime requires that the qualifying use is use which furthers the social wellbeing of the local community this means that social wellbeing in the context of the ACV regime is similar to social welfare because it has a public element. There is also the statement in that passage by Romer LJ that social welfare can include "spiritual" wellbeing which runs counter to the dicta of Judge Lane in the *New Church* case but which bears greater weight.

The phrase is also used in the *Recreational Charities Act 1958* and was considered in *Guild v IRC* [1992] 2 All ER 10. The issue was whether the advancement of social welfare required that it improved the condition of life for persons who suffer from some form of social disadvantage. Lord Keith at page 18 stated that "It suffices if they are provided with the object of improving the conditions of life for members of the community generally." This fits in very well with the requirements of the ACV regime.

Lastly in the context of exemption from VAT whether an organisation is devoted to social wellbeing was considered by the Court of Appeal in *Leisure, Independence, Friendship & Enablement Services Limited v IRC* [2020] EWCA Civ 452 Arnold LJ stated at paragraph 84:

"But the fact that a charity's purposes must be for the public benefit in that sense does not necessarily mean that those purposes are "devoted to social wellbeing". "Social wellbeing" concerns the wellbeing of members of society."

This serves to emphasise the width of the meaning of the phrase and that when adopted the intention is to include rather than to exclude which contrasts with the approach of Judge Lane.

6. Religion – The Trustees of Methodist Church are charitable trustees and for a trust to be charitable certain requirements have to be satisfied which in my view will bear on this issue. One of the heads of charitable purposes is the advancement of religion (section 3(1)(c) of the *Charities Act 2011*). In order to be charitable it is not enough that the charity is religious

in character. There must also be an element of demonstrable public benefit otherwise it cannot be charitable. In my view this is a factor to take into account when considering the meaning of “social wellbeing”.

An enclosed order cannot be a charity. In *Cocks v Manners* (1871) LR 12 EQ 574 Sir John Wickens VC stated at page 585:

“A voluntary association of women for the purpose of working out their own salvation by religious exercises and self-denial seems to me to have none of the requisites of a charitable institution, whether the word "charitable" is used in its popular sense or in its legal sense. It is said, in some of the cases, that religious purposes are charitable, but that can only be true as to religious services tending directly or indirectly towards the instruction or the edification of the public; an annuity to an individual, so long as he spent his time in retirement and constant devotion, would not be charitable, nor would a gift to ten persons, so long as they lived together in retirement and performed acts of devotion, be charitable.”

This approach has been confirmed in *Gilmour v Coats* [1949] AC 426 which concerned a priory occupied by a cloistered order of nuns living secluded from the world. This decision was in turn applied in *Re Warre’s Will Trusts* [1953] WLR 725 in which Harman J. stated at page 729 that “Activities which do not in any way affect the public or any section of it are not charitable.”

Such an approach is not applied too strictly. Cross J. held in *Neville Estates Limited v Madden* [1962] Ch. 832 that a trust to maintain a Jewish place of worship in Catford was for the public benefit and so charitable. His reason for doing so resonates in the consideration of this matter. At page 853 he stated that

“But the court is, I think, entitled to assume that some benefit accrues to the public from the attendance at places of worship of persons who live in this world and mix with their fellow citizens. As between different religions the law stands neutral, but it assumes that any religion is at least likely to be better than none.”

He also considered that the ability to arrange social activities for members and their families was ancillary to the religious activities (page 852) and so the trusts were for the advancement of religion and did not invoke the decision in *IRC v Baddeley* supra so as to cause the trust not to be charitable.

The Charity Commission has published a guide on the advancement of religion for public benefit which is not binding but is relevant. In section D2 examples are given of the benefits which demonstrate a public benefit in a religious trust:

“However, in addition to providing a moral or ethical framework, where there is sufficient evidence of benefit to society, the following are examples of the ways in which advancing religion has the potential to be for the public benefit:

- the provision of sacred spaces, churches and worship services;
- the provision of public rituals and ceremonies;
- contributing to the spiritual and moral education of children;
- contributing towards a better society for example by promoting social cohesion and social capital;
- carrying out, as a practical expression of religious beliefs, other activities (such as advancing education or conflict resolution, or relieving poverty), which may also be charitable;
- contributing to followers’ or adherents’ good mental and physical health; aiding the prevention of ill health, speeding recovery and fostering composure in the face of ill health;
- providing comfort to the bereaved;
- healthcare and social care”

Further in the guide (Annex B) an example of missionary or outreach work is stated to include “cultural and community activities provided either in the place of worship or in the buildings attached, such as the provision of free community kitchens in gurdwaras”.

Section E3 makes it clear that restrictions imposed on the public benefit to be provided so as to accord with the beliefs of the religious organisation will not prevent the public benefit causing the trust or body to be charitable. It also makes the point that an isolated chapel with a congregation of one will still be regarded as providing a public benefit provided that it is open to all.

Charging for a service does not prevent the provider being a charity (Scottish Burial Reform & Cremation Society Limited v Glasgow Corp [1968] AC 138). The Charity Commission in its guide makes the point that a charity advancing religion might reasonably charge for the use of its property (section E4).

For the purposes of charity law the availability of a place of worship to be used for worship by the public constitutes a public benefit. In my view it would be very strange that a religious charity must satisfy the public benefit element in charity law but in no circumstances can the public benefit provided by the place of worship and surrounding buildings and land satisfy the statutory requirement in section 88(1)(a) and (2)(a).

This case provides a good example of the oddity of such a position. The Church was described by the member of the congregation with responsibility for it as a community centre. No better example of an ACV is there than a community centre yet because it is owned by a religious charity and part is a place of worship that is said to exclude it from being listed even though the ACV contains no provision to that effect and such provisions as are relevant strongly lead to the opposite conclusion. In my view there is no justification for such a conclusion. The owner in the New Church case supra is a charity and thus its activities must be for the public benefit in order to qualify for that status but there was no discussion of this point which in order to fully consider such a point there should have been. For the Trustees to be providing at the Church something of public benefit but for it not to further the social wellbeing of the local community appears illogical.

7. Methodist faith – the general point made in section 6 above is strengthened with regard to the Methodist faith. On the Methodist Church website there is a section on Property and Mission. On that page the introductory paragraph states:

“The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. Property plays a significant role in enabling a presence within communities. A Methodist building that is welcoming, eye-catching and that acts as a focal point for community engagement can speak powerfully of God’s love. Utilising a property either by redeveloping it for social purpose or incorporating a range of social uses into an existing building is as much a part of a mission plan as preaching, worship or community evangelism.”

On the inspiration page of the website there are links to recent projects. One involves the inclusion of a village shop in a Methodist Church (16th September 2021). Another at St. Mark’s Crescent is a community focused project which on the link sets out a number of users of the church which use has some similarity to the Church.

The webpage headed “The Letting Property and Third Party use” starts by stating that:

“Managing Trustees play a valued role in ensuring that church premises best serve the mission of the Methodist Church. Managing Trustees across the Connexion encourage the local community to use church premises to seek, amongst other things, to;

- create links between the local community and the Methodist Church;
- support local community and youth projects; and/ or
- raise additional income to support Mission purposes.”

What is clear is that no distinction is being drawn here between religious activity as a main purpose and social activity as an ancillary use. The social activity is a main purpose and not ancillary to worship.

8. Ancillary – a crucial point in the New Church case was the classification by Judge Lane of certain activities as ancillary. This word also had an importance role in the Council's decision not to list. In the Council's report on the nomination the discussion regarding what is meant by the terms "ancillary" and "non-ancillary" is at pages 39 and 40. It is considered in the report that what has to be determined is whether the main use of the buildings is as a place of worship or a community centre. This is based on the assumption that the dicta of Judge Lane in the New Church excluding religious use from being a qualifying use for the purposes of the ACV regime is correct. Separately this approach does not allow for the possibility that there can be more than one non-ancillary use of the nominated asset.

As with terms such as "recent past" there is no statutory definition in the 2011 Act or in the 2012 Regulations of "ancillary" and "non-ancillary". The Official Guidance issued by the DCLG is silent on this issue (see para. 3.5). However, in the paper "Understanding the Community Right to Bid" to be found on the government sponsored "my community rights" website the phrases "principal use" and "main use" are to be found.

It is noticeable that in the decisions by the First Tier Tribunal on appeals from a review of a listing decision the judges have deliberately refrained from setting out what is meant by ancillary. On the appeal to the Upper Tribunal in the Admiral Taverns case supra Judge Levenson refused to give guidance stating at paragraph 28:

"There was some suggestion from Mr Phillips that the Upper Tribunal should give guidance on what is meant by "ancillary" in this context, and reference was made to certain other First-tier Tribunal decisions. It seems to me that "ancillary" is an ordinary word to be understood in the context of the relevant legislation and in light of the facts of any particular case, and any further comment by the Upper Tribunal on its meaning would lead to more confusion rather than less."

One meaning of ancillary is something which is connected with but less important than the main thing. However, in my view that is not the only meaning. It can mean something of secondary importance. To be subordinate to something does not in my view mean that it has to be supportive of something. It can just mean that it is less significant or important as compared to something else.

There is legislation which when using the term "ancillary" means that something is connected with but less important than the main thing. That is the case with the requirements to be satisfied by industrial buildings related to the retail trade in order to qualify for capital allowances (*Sarsfield v Dixon Group* (1998) 71 TC 121 and CA 32313 HMRC Capital Allowances Manual) and also with extended hours under the licencing law to cover the sale of liquor ancillary to sale of food (*R v Liverpool Justices ex parte Tynan* [1961] 1 WLR 837). However, with such legislation it is expressly stated what is the main purpose to which the other is ancillary. That is not the case with this legislation. There is also a particular meaning of

ancillary for the purposes of paragraph 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 but that is a special meaning which is contrasted with use which is “incidental” and as such not helpful to this matter. In any event the First Tier Tribunal has been very careful to rebuff suggestions that the tribunal adopt terms and approaches from planning law.

It was argued in the appeal in the Firoka case supra regarding the Kassam Stadium that it was necessary to view the stadium as a planning unit and to determine what is the primary use of the stadium. To this end evidence was given to show that 35% of receipts came from Oxford United FC whilst the remaining 65% came from London Welsh and other activities at the stadium. There was considerable use of the stadium for events and conferences. Oxford United FC had only 25 to 30 matches there whilst the numbers attending games was either equal as regards the two teams or slightly in favour of London Welsh. The judge refused to apply the planning approach to the facts of the appeal. At para. 9 he stated that

“I have no doubt that local planning information will often form an important part of the factual background to be taken into account when making decisions under the Act. I do not accept, however, that concepts such as the “planning unit”, developed by judges for a different purpose, should be imported; nor should they be allowed to restrict the Act to “primary uses”, words which, if intended, could so easily have been used. True it is that in making decisions under the Act local authorities and Tribunals may have to draw lines; but such judgments should be made by applying the words actually used by Parliament to the actualities of the individual case.”

He then went on to point out that Oxford United currently played football at the stadium and that was one of the current uses. At para. 10 the judge stated “Is that an “ancillary” use? It is true that there are only about 25 match days a year. In my judgment, however, the cultural, recreational and sporting interests with which I am concerned extend wider than the hour and a half or so for which 20 – 30 men play a game of football. The role of a football club in the local community goes far beyond that. This point is made in written submissions from OxVox the supporters’ trust which nominated the stadium as an ACV. The existence of a home town club, intrinsically linked to the use of its home ground, fosters community pride; stimulates daily conversations in pubs, work places and online; forges friendships and encourages the mix of generations. It was a recognition of the importance of this, no doubt, which resulted in the planning application for the whole stadium being made in 1996 “on behalf of Oxford United FC”.”

On the basis of this the judge considered that the conditions in section 88(1) of the 2011 Act to be satisfied. All of what he stated in para. 10 appears on the face of it to be directed to the issue as to whether the particular facts of the case satisfy the local community requirement and nothing is expressly directed at whether the use is an ancillary use. However, what is set out there was clearly taken by the judge as deciding not just the issue of satisfaction of the local community requirement but also whether the use is ancillary. He expressly recognised that it was an issue that he had to decide.

The exercise carried out by the judge was not one in which the various uses were analysed in order to determine the single predominant use. Rather the judge looked at all the circumstances in order to determine whether

(a) there was an important link between the particular use of the building and land and the local community so that the nominated building and land could genuinely be described as a community asset; and

(b) that use was significant so that it was not ancillary.

It has to be borne in mind that this was in the context of a building in which there were apparently three uses which were the playing of football, the playing of rugby and the holding of events.

What constitutes ancillary use has also been considered by Judge Lane in *Idsall School v Shropshire Council* CR/2014/0016 which concerned the playing fields of a private school used also by a sports centre.

“15. In the circumstances, I do not consider that the *Harrods* cases offer much assistance in deciding whether the use by the community of the playing fields at Idsall is “ancillary” to the School’s use of them. Of more relevance is the First-tier Tribunal’s decision in *Dorset County Council v Purbeck District Council* (CR/2013/004), where the President held that use of School playing fields at Wareham by established community sports teams was “an ancillary use of the school site” [17]. In so finding, however, Judge Warren specifically rejected the contention that community use of school premises, pursuant to Schedule 1 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (whereby a community’s use of school facilities “must always be subordinated to the primary needs of the school”) meant that, for the purposes of the 2011 Act, such community use must necessarily be “ancillary” [13] and [14]. In Judge Warren’s view it:

“will depend on the facts. I specifically reject the submission that the “quantum” or amount of use cannot be determinative and that it is the status of the user as against the rights of the owner which counts”.

16. I respectfully agree. The issue of what is “ancillary” for the purposes of the 2011 Act is essentially fact-specific. I see nothing in the Act which compels the conclusion that there must always be only one primary use of the land or buildings in question, to which any other use must necessarily be ancillary. If use A is, in reality, no more than supportive or otherwise serving the purpose of use B, then use A will be ancillary to use B: as Mr Bircher observed, the word “ancillary” comes from the Latin *ancilla* = maidservant. I also agree with Mr Hopkins that there may be cases where, even though there is no functional relationship between uses A and B, use A may properly be said to be ancillary to use B if a comparison of the two reveals use A to be so minor or minimal as to make it unreal to equate the two uses for the purpose of section 88. Accordingly, like Judge Warren in the *Dorset* case, I reject the

submission that the quantum or amount of a use cannot be determinative, at least in certain situations.

17. The Council contends that the number of hours designated for community use, pursuant to the Joint User Agreement is more than the number allocated for School use. The School counters that, in reality, the playing fields, (not being floodlit) are unavailable for community use during the winter months, given that it will be dark by 5pm. Both sides have a point. The reality, however, is that the usage figures for the playing fields demonstrate what in my view is very significant community use, which is plainly not supportive of the School's use."

A principal use of a building or land which satisfies the local community requirement will cause that building or land to qualify for listing. On the basis of this judgment when there is mixed user then there needs to be an enquiry as to whether there is a significant use satisfying the local community requirement which causes the building or land to be regarded as a community asset which is not an ancillary use. In order to qualify it is not necessary that the "community use" be the predominant use but it needs to be a significant use which causes the asset to be viewed as a community asset. It is only if the non-community use is not so significant as to cause the building or land to be viewed as a community asset that the building or land will not qualify for listing.

An alternative way in which this may be put is that if there is a mixed user then any significant use will suffice but a use which is clearly a secondary use will not. It is enough that the community use is one of the significant uses without necessarily being the predominant use. I am uncertain whether the statements that the use satisfying the local community requirement must be the main use are intended to mean that if there are two or more uses of a building or land only one will be the main use and all others must be ancillary. In my view this will not necessarily be the case.

In my view an ancillary use is one which in the context of the nominated building or land and the actual uses of that building or land is not significant and is a markedly lesser or minor use than the other actual use or uses. It is irrelevant to this issue in my opinion whether or not one use is supportive of another.

In consequence I do not consider that the main use of the Church has to be as a community centre in order that it can qualify as an ACV. It is enough that it is a significant use of the buildings as in the case of the football activities in the Firoka case. There is a distinction to be drawn between activities involving the congregation which can be viewed as part of the use of the buildings as a place of worship or as ancillary to the worship and those activities which are not limited to the congregation but involve the wider local community. Such activities are not in my view ancillary to the use of the buildings as a place of worship. In my view they are a separate use of the buildings whether or not described as the main use.

9. Planning – the position under planning law is not applied automatically to ACV cases. However, account can be taken of it. A church with a planning use as a place of worship

will for the purposes of planning be regarded as a community facility. This is illustrated by the recent planning decision ref: APP/K3605/W/21/3277254 which concerned the Emmanuel Hall in Walton-on-Thames. There was an issue as to which Use Class it fell into. The planning inspector considered that it was unnecessary to determine this point or whether it was a church or church hall. Places of worship are included amongst the examples of community facilities given in the NPPF and as such “the appeal site is certainly a “community facility”” (para. 12).

It is relevant not just that this was a reason for the appeal failing but that nationwide the NPPF treats places of worship as a community facility. This is emphatically made clear in three places in the NPPF (paragraphs 84(d), 93(a) and 187). It is inconceivable in my view that a place of worship must be regarded as a community facility for the purposes of planning yet not be eligible as an asset class to qualify as an ACV particularly when there is an absence from the ACV regime of any provisions which justify such an exclusion.

10. ACV listings of places of worship – I am aware of three churches that have been listed and suspect that there may be more. Sheffield Council listed the Horizon Methodist Church. Oxford City Council listed the Temple Cowley United Reform Group because of the significant number of users of the building for meetings and social activities (para. 33 refers to 600 per week). Lastly Bath and North East Somerset Council listed the Trinity Methodist Church. This is not binding but it is to be regretted if different authorities are applying different interpretations of the law rather than coming to different judgments on facts. It is perhaps relevant that the Trustees did not challenge the listings of these Methodist Churches on appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal.

In Simon Adamyk’s book on ACV Law and Practice it is stated that as at January 2015 churches represented 4% of the assets which had been listed (para. 9.6). This is taken from the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee Report of Session 2014-2015 pages 8/9.

I note that as a result of a joint opinion from Gregory Jones QC and Charles Holland Maidestone BC have accepted a second nomination of a Methodist Church for determination having removed the Church from its ACV list on a review on the basis of the New Church case. The joint opinion is of the view that the dicta of Judge Lane in the New Church case is wrong.

11. Conclusion on whether the Church is an ACV

(i) the Council’s decision to refuse to list hinges on the correctness of the decision in the New Church case that use of a building for a religious purpose cannot be a qualifying use. I do not consider this to be correct. In my view such religious use is not excluded because:

(a) the focus of the ACV regime is on the use of land or a building and not on the description of the land or building or the characteristics of the owner;

(b) religious use furthers the social wellbeing of a local community regardless of whether it constitutes social interest and this was not considered in the New Church case;

(c) places of worship are quite deliberately not excluded from the operation of the ACV regime as they are not included in Schedule 1 of the 2012 Regulations;

(d) paragraph 12 of Schedule 3 of the 2012 Regulations strongly indicates that the ACV regime does apply to places of worship;

(e) ownership by a charity or a religious body is not provided in the ACV regime as a reason for excluding land or buildings from being listed;

(f) the activities carried on at many places of worship provide a great benefit to the local community and there is no reason in principle why they are excluded from qualifying for the purposes of the ACV regime because the building or land is part of a place of worship;

(g) a substantial majority of the activities at the Church are not social activities for members of the congregation and their families but are specifically aimed at providing a benefit for the local community as a demonstration of faith. They are not religious activities such as a service or Bible class but acts of faith in their own right. A separate community centre or kitchen run by a church will qualify as an ACV. What logical justification can there be for disregarding such activity if it is carried on at a place of worship?

(h) most religious activities as a matter of law are regarded as providing a public benefit (see section 6 above) but even if they were not the substantial majority of the activities at the Church were not religious activities.

(i) for there to be a difference in treatment of places of worship between planning law and the ACV regime as to whether a community facility there would have to be a very cogent reason.

(j) acts of faith which are not religious events are a separate use for the purposes of the ACV regime if religious use is properly not regarded as a qualifying use for the purposes of the ACV regime.

(k) in any event the New Church case is distinguishable because the sole purpose of the building was use as a church but that is not the case with the Church which had more than one purpose.

(l) Judge Lane did not have the benefit of full arguments on this issue in the New Church case and many of the points discussed above were not considered by him albeit that they are substantial points.

(ii) in any event a use can be a qualifying use for the purposes of section 88 even if not the main use. It is enough that the use is a significant use of the nominated land or building as in the Firoka case which is not ancillary.

(iii) social activities for members of the local community are not ancillary to the use of the buildings for worship in contrast to social events limited to members of the congregation and their families.

In my view as a matter of law the Church qualifies as an ACV and the Council was wrong to refuse to list it as an ACV on the grounds set out in the report of Mr. McBride.

12. Fresh nomination - there is no statutory appeal available by which to challenge a refusal to list a nominated asset. The choice, therefore, lies between judicial review or a fresh nomination. As has been illustrated by the recent decision of Lane J. in R (oao TV Harrison CIC) v Leeds City Council [2022] EWHC 130 (Admin) it is possible to have a refusal to list quashed. In that case two grounds for the application concerned the failure to take into account material considerations and taking into account immaterial considerations. One was concerned with bias. The last was that the authority failed to apply the correct threshold. The applicant was successful on all grounds. As regards the last ground Lane J. considered that the listing authority “did not understand correctly the law” (para. 82).

The issue as to bias does not arise here but the other grounds are relevant. In my view there are good grounds for applying for judicial review and for the dicta in the New Church case being held to be wrong. Notwithstanding this I consider that the Parish Council is adopting the correct approach in first making a fresh nomination. In deciding on this course it is a relevant factor that judicial review proceedings will involve the expenditure of public funds regardless of the outcome as it will be two public authorities contesting the issue. A fresh nomination is proportionate and provides the Council with an opportunity to reconsider the New Church case in the light of this advice. I am encouraged in that view by the acceptance by Maidstone BC of the second nomination of a Methodist Church and by the joint opinion in that case supporting the views expressed in this advice.

13. Overall conclusions

(i) in my view places of worship are subject to the ACV regime and not excluded from it.

(ii) the past use of the Church is sufficient to satisfy the statutory condition in section 88(2)(a);

(iii) if my view expressed in (i) is wrong then I consider that the activities carried on at the Church for the local community and not limited to members of the congregation will not be an ancillary use;

(iv) judicial review proceedings could be commenced on the ground that applying the decision in the New Church Case is wrong and that treating the activities for the local community at the Church as an ancillary use is wrong.

(v) the alternative course of action is to make a fresh nomination. In my view that is a more proportionate response as an initial course of action.

Christopher Cant

Clerksroom

12th March 2022



Appledore

Churches

Appledore

United Church Cade Road,
Ashford

Charing

St. Andrews, Cheriton

Dymchurch

Elham

Folkestone

Church of the Good Shepherd,
Hamstreet

Headcorn

St Michael's Methodist-Anglican
Church Centre, Hythe

Kennington

Lydd

Lyminge

New Romney

Rhodes Minnis

Shadoxhurst

Tenterden

Location:

The Street
Appledore
TN26 2AE

Minister:

Revd T Fogden (Church of England)



Appledore Chapel

Services

Church Events

Groups

Worship Resources

Morning Worship: 10:30am on the first Sunday of the month **at the Anglican church**

Holy Communion:

The 4th Wednesday in the month at 12:00 noon.

< APRIL – MAY 2022 > Collapse All Expand All Agenda

APR 3
Sun
2022

Appledore – United Service at Anglicans
Apr 3 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Appledore UA [Read more](#)

APR 27
Wed
2022

Appledore – Revd G Songer
Apr 27 @ 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Appledore HC [Read more](#)

MAY 1
Sun
2022

Appledore – United Service at Anglicans
May 1 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Appledore UA [Read more](#)

MAY 25
Wed
2022

Appledore – Revd A Hewitt
May 25 @ 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Appledore HC [Read more](#)

< APRIL – MAY 2022 >



Headcorn

Churches

Appledore

United Church Cade Road,
Ashford

Charing

St. Andrews, Cheriton

Dymchurch

Elham

Folkestone

Church of the Good Shepherd,
Hamstreet

Headcorn

St Michael's Methodist-Anglican
Church Centre, Hythe

Kennington

Lydd

Lyminge

New Romney

Rhodes Minnis

Shadoxhurst

Tenterden

We are a small Methodist congregation including people from Headcorn, Staplehurst, Biddenden, Sutton Valence and Ulcombe. We are committed to offering the "Methodist Way of Life" to all who live in our communities and the surrounding countryside. We meet for worship in Headcorn Village Hall. **Free of the responsibility for maintaining a building we can devote all our resources to our calling.**

Location:

The congregation of Headcorn Methodist Church are now meeting in the village hall.
Church Ln,
Headcorn,
Ashford
TN27 9NR



Minister:

Revd H Hollands

Services

Church Events

Groups

Worship Resources

Morning Worship: 10:30am

< MARCH – MAY 2022 >



Collapse All

Expand All

Agenda

MAR
27
Sun
2022

Headcorn – P Missin
Mar 27 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Headcorn

Read more

APR
3
Sun
2022

Headcorn – Church Family
Apr 3 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Headcorn LC

Read more

APR
10
Sun
2022

Headcorn – Revd K Taylor
Apr 10 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: HC Headcorn

Read more

APR
17
Sun
2022

Headcorn – Revd H Hollands
Apr 17 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

CATEGORIES: CHURCH SERVICES TAGS: Headcorn

Read more



Churches

Appledore

United Church Cade Road,
Ashford

Charing

St. Andrews, Cheriton

Dymchurch

Elham

Folkestone

Church of the Good Shepherd,
Hamstreet

Headcorn

St Michael's Methodist-Anglican
Church Centre, Hythe

Kennington

Lydd

Lyminge

New Romney

Rhodes Minnis

Shadoxhurst

Tenterden

Shadoxhurst

We are a small rural congregation of about 12-15 members. All are welcome and visitors have often commented what a friendly church we are.

In 2018 we celebrated the 150th anniversary of our current building with a special weekend of celebrations, a display of church history, and plenty of tea and cake. We were delighted that this weekend brought many visitors through our doors. We are committed to being M.A.D which stands for making a difference and we firmly believe that as Christians we are called to make a difference in our communities and by helping those less fortunate than ourselves. To this end our church supports Water Aid, Porchlight (a Kent based charity working with homeless people), Demelza House Childrens Hospice, and we also sponsor a child through World Vision. We also support the local foodbank and Christmas appeals for underprivileged children.

Having been closed for 18 months during the pandemic we have only recently reopened for public worship and hope to get back to a regular pattern of varied services ranging from Holy Communion to Cafe Church – an all age interactive form of worship with activities, discussion and refreshments in an informal setting, which attracts several visitors including young children. Do join us for one of our services.

Location:

Church Lane,
Shadoxhurst,
TN26 1LY

Minister:

Revd H Hollands



Shadoxhurst Chapel

Services

Church Events

Groups

Worship Resources

Morning Worship: 10:30am

Cafe Church on the 2nd Sunday of each month (excluding August & November) offers informal worship suitable for all ages with crafts, discussion and reflection. This attracts a number of visitors and the age range of attendees is from 4-90+. From March 2020 there will be an additional Café Church at 4pm on the 5th Sunday, instead of a morning service – all are welcome.

< APRIL – MAY 2022 >

🗑️ Collapse All 📄 Expand All 📅 Agenda ▾

APR
3
Sun
2022

Shadoxhurst – Revd H Hollands
Apr 3 @ 10:30 am – 11:30 am

📁 CATEGORIES: ● CHURCH SERVICES 🏷️ TAGS:

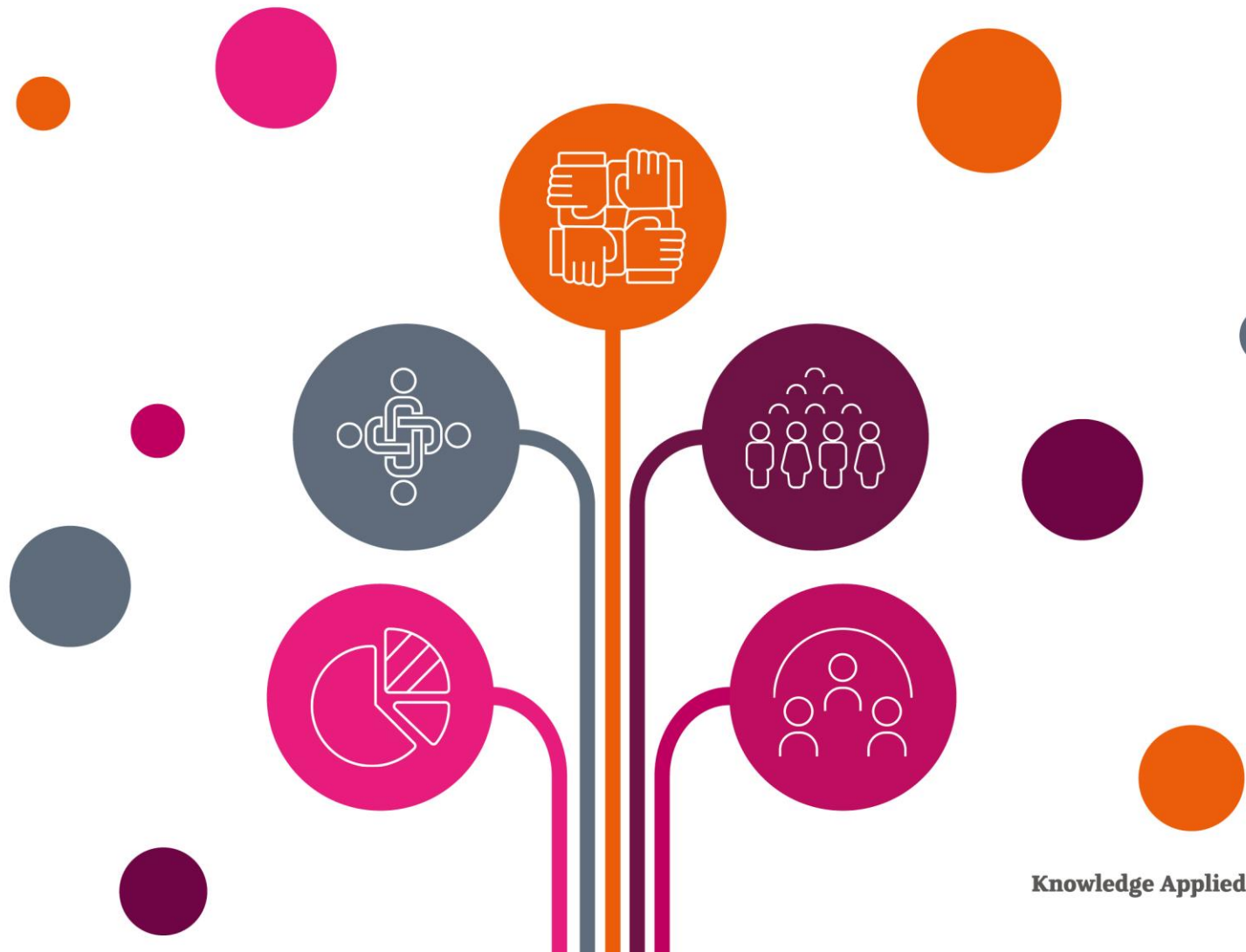
📍 Shadoxhurst

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The Impact of Covid-19 on Village and Community Halls in England

Findings report

June 2021



The Impact of Covid -19 on Village and Community Halls in England

Findings Report

Written on behalf of:

Action with Communities in Rural England

Authored by :

Dr Tom Archer

Carina Skropke

June 2021

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Executive Summary

- Building on the Village and Community Halls Survey in 2020, this research provides insights into the ongoing impact of Covid-19, notably on the operations, governance, finances and service provision of halls. The survey was circulated to respondents from the 2020 survey and achieved 1,017 responses. The similarities between the two samples in the 2020 and 2021 aids an assessment of change, and helps us to understand the significant impact of the pandemic.
- 15 per cent of halls have played a formal role in response to the pandemic, specifically through emergency food provision, hosting NHS services (including testing and vaccinations), and the provision of childcare. The pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of halls in periods of emergency as designated places of safety. However, this statutory status confers few additional resources, and this should be addressed where halls take on extra responsibilities. Another cohort of halls have been wholly closed throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, with various implications for the halls themselves and their local communities.
- There are worrying signs that some halls (1.4 per cent of our sample) will not open again, and this is likely to be a minimum figure. When grossed to the national level this could mean the closure of 140 individual halls and is an indicator of the immediate need for support.
- The current financial health of halls is somewhat polarised, with around the same proportion having seen their finances improve or worsen. There appears to be a relationship between the size of the population served and a hall's financial health. Those serving bigger communities have generally seen a worsening in their financial position and heavier reliance on reserves, and this may reflect differing financial models and income streams.
- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants have been highly valued, alongside other small business grants and rate reliefs. This, alongside local authority and parish council support, has enabled halls to stabilise their finances. Halls receiving Covid-19 related grants and payments were significantly less likely to see their financial position as having worsened.
- Around nine per cent of halls employing staff had reduced their staffing hours, a sign that internal capacity may be diminishing. This will have the consequence of placing even more pressure on volunteers.
- While grants and payment have stabilised, or at least mitigated, the damage to most hall finances, the long-term outlook is uncertain. Open responses suggest halls are worried about users returning, and the financial implications of this. Halls are not commercial entities, and their business models reflect this. Therefore, applying the same expectations about recovery as those for commercial enterprises will not be appropriate. There are significant and justified worries about the return of both volunteers and users. We recommend urgent attention is given to some form of bridging funding or finance, so halls can survive this challenging period with its uncertainties about when users and volunteers will return.
- Halls stated that this type of flexible grant funding is the most important form of support that could be provided. Alongside this, continued relief from business rates was deemed

critical. It is recommended that halls across England should benefit from the mandatory and full discretionary rate relief, and policy mechanisms should be used to ensure this happens at the local authority level. The preferred forms of support largely align with the wider community business sector, with the exception of rate reliefs. We therefore recommend exploring broad -based interventions which could impact across the community business sector.

- A significant number of halls that had planned improvements are now not going ahead with these. In order to ensure these improvements are undertaken the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund should be re-established. This could potentially target halls that had to postpone or cancel work in order to use their reserves to replace lost income. The building of new halls, or replacement of old ones, are the most likely improvements to have been abandoned by respondents. In quantity only 23 respondents stated they had previously planned to replace their hall. However, eight of these projects are now no longer going ahead.
- Another cohort of halls have invested during the pandemic to improve their buildings and services, seemingly using the opportunities presented as halls have been closed. New activities are being designed to diversify the user base, and capital investments have been made to facilitate this. However, certain activities in some halls will not return, notably yoga, dance and Pilates classes. There are specific worries that older users will not return, and that related activities will fold. We recommend that the ACRE Network undertakes work nationally to promote the availability of halls and their uses to different audiences and user groups.
- Halls stated that the biggest problem they faced was the drop in fundraising, alongside challenges in managing services under Covid-19 restrictions and the associated pressures this placed on volunteers. There is reticence among older volunteers about returning to voluntary commitments. The difficulties recruiting new volunteers may affect the return of services and activities, as well the prospect of good governance.
- Analysis of open responses highlights three categories of support central to halls as they recover from Covid-19: 1) increased community involvement to run and govern halls and to restart activities, 2) financial support to maintain and improve buildings, as well as enabling halls to grow their income for long term sustainability, and 3) information, advice and training on Covid-19 related regulations, and also wider issues concerning health and safety, recruitment and fundraising.
- Over half the halls responding to the survey (54 per cent) had sought advice from their village hall/community building service provided by an ACRE Network member since February 2020. 98 per cent felt this support was 'good' or 'excellent'. Although respondents emphasise the quality and importance of the information ACRE prepares and publishes, there is still a need for updated information and guidance, particularly in respect to changing regulations and the easing of restrictions. The ACRE Network should continue to provide vital support in this area. To do this ACRE Network members need to be adequately resourced to deliver their support services.

Introduction

This report builds on the extensive English Village and Community Hall Survey, undertaken in early 2020.¹ This former study identified a number of important findings about the governance and management of halls, their finances, environmental impact and services, and the fabric of their buildings. However, the data captured was largely gathered before the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 took hold.

It was predicted that the pandemic would have a profound effect on community buildings and the organisations managing these. Restrictions on the use of indoor and outdoor spaces, and the services provided within them, alongside the demands placed on volunteers and users at such a difficult time, was forecast to have a major impact on these important community assets. To understand the impact of the recent Covid-19 outbreak, and the capacity of halls to recover, Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to run a short follow-up survey with a sample of halls. This survey has sought to understand not only the impact of the pandemic, but also the role of different support packages in helping halls weather the storm, the risks and challenges faced, and the support needs of halls in the immediate moment and coming months.

The following report presents the key findings from the survey. First, we outline the methods employed, the scale of responses and the margin of error in our final dataset. We then provide key insights in three sub-sections, focusing on: 1) the general impact of Covid-19 on hall governance and finances, among other things, 2) the risks and problems faced by halls as restrictions are lifted and some normality returns to their operations, 3) the kinds of support that have proved valuable, and will prove valuable in the future.

1.1. Survey methods

The extensive surveying in 2020, alongside the immediate pressures on halls, meant this follow-up survey had to be much shorter. An online survey was designed comprising 35 questions, and this was emailed to respondents from the 2020 survey. This has enabled us to assess potential changes in specific variables over the preceding year. The survey ran from 1 March 2021 to 30 April 2021. Once the survey was closed, the data was cleaned, duplicate cases were removed, and the final dataset was analysed in SPSS and Mapinfo.

1.2. The sample and margin of error

The final dataset contains 1,017 responses from individual halls (with 295 of these being partial responses). This response rate represents 10 per cent of all known village and community halls in England. The calculated margin of error for the typical variable,

¹ Archer et al (2020) The English Village and Community Hall Survey 2020. Accessed at: <https://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/village-hall-survey-report-2020-final-digital-edition.pdf>

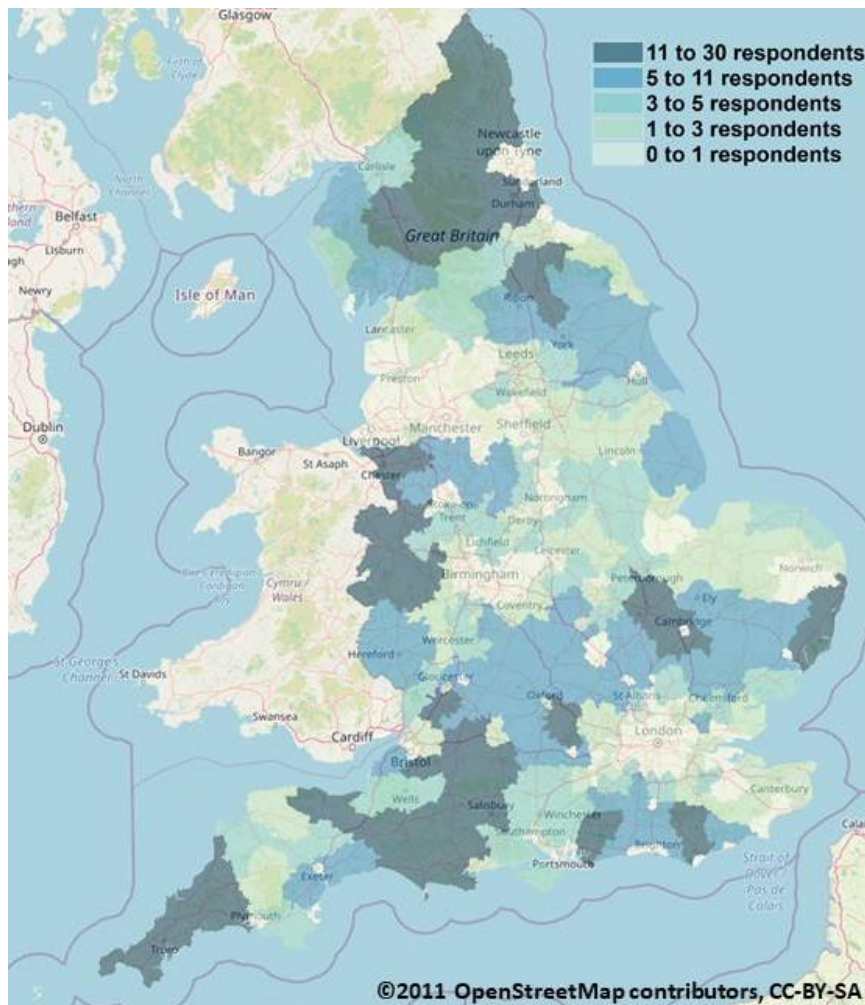
with basic assumptions about distribution of data, is ± 2.5 per cent at the 95 per cent level. This means that 95 per cent of the time we would expect that the true value lies within a range of 2.5 per cent either side of the reported value. Comparisons with the 2020 survey data are possible, given the similarities between respondents in the 2020 and 2021 survey. For instance, in terms of the size of population served by halls, the two samples are very similar (Table 1). The 2021 survey also achieved a relatively even distribution of responses in terms of geography (Figure 1).

Table 1: Populations served by respondent halls, 2021 and 2020 samples

	2021 %	2020 %
Up to 300	16.0	15.9
301 – 600	19.0	21.1
601 – 1,000	16.2	15
1,001 – 2,000	16.4	16.6
2,001 – 4,000	15.3	15.1
4,001 – 10,000	11.8	10.4
More than 10,001	5.3	5.8
Total	100.0	100

Base: 856 halls

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents (number of respondent halls)



The Impact of Covid -19

2

The following section assesses responses to the survey to present a picture of the impacts of Covid-19 on halls through 2020 and early 2021. The section starts by looking at the operational status of halls over the past year, before exploring how the pandemic has affected their finances, improvement plans, and the use and services offered by halls.

2.1. Operations through the pandemic

Just over 40 per cent of respondent halls to the 2021 survey suggested they had continued to operate, at least in part, during the pandemic. Nearly two thirds of these respondents had opened all or part of their halls, except during lockdowns. There is evidence that some halls have, albeit in part, remained functional even during the lockdowns. Approximately 85 halls responded in this way, suggesting they were being used for some essential provision or services. As discussed further below, halls have played a valuable role in local action and service provision during the pandemic, not least in providing a base for emergency food provision and space for vital childcare in the second and third lockdowns.

While some halls have opened during the pandemic, the majority have in fact been largely closed. When asked if they had continued to operate during the course of the pandemic, 59 per cent of halls said 'No'. Interrogating these responses suggests that over 86 per cent of these had been closed throughout, except for essential maintenance/security checks, but that they did anticipate reopening in future.

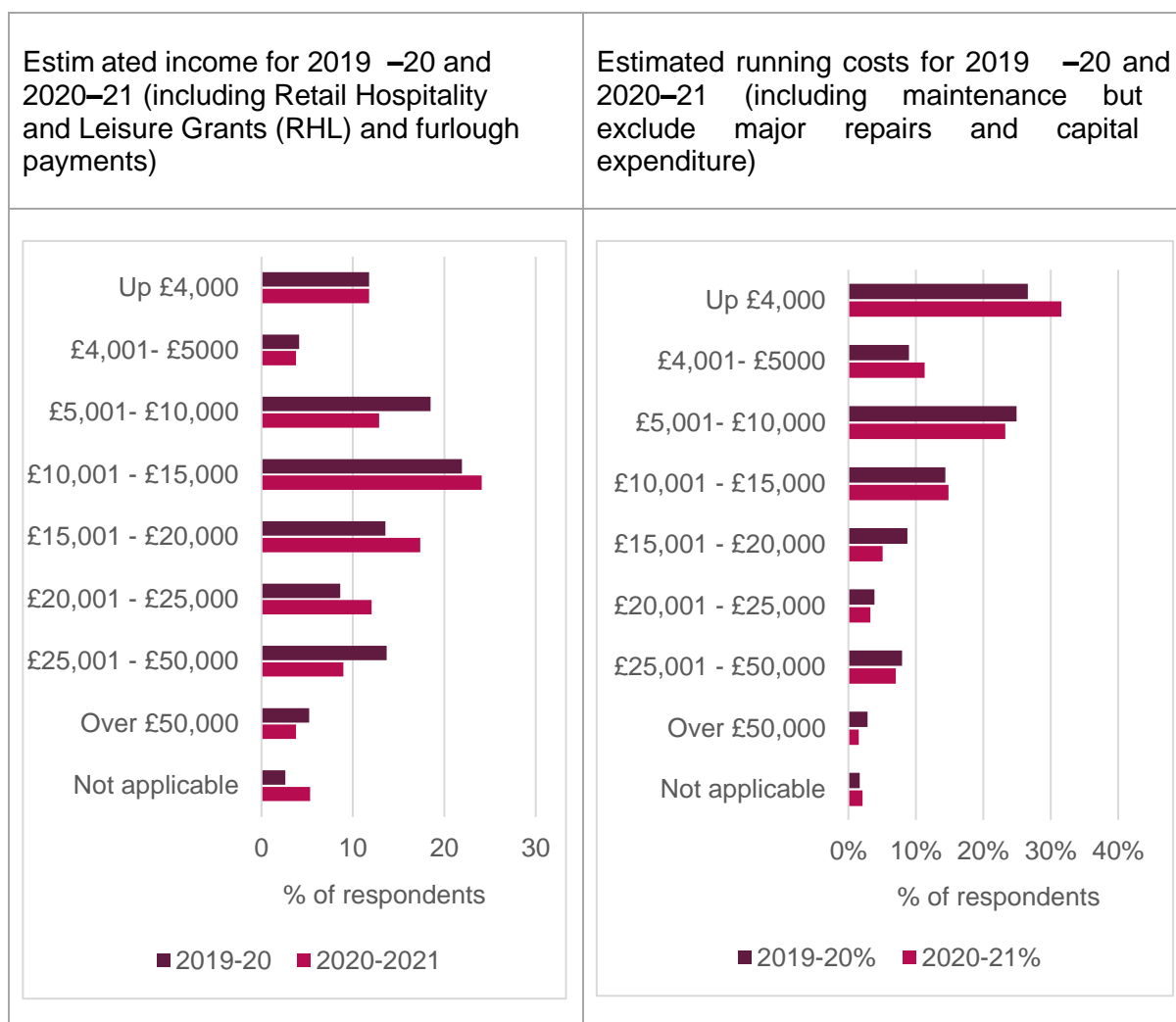
Despite these positive signs of future provision, there are a worrying number of halls that have been closed and do not anticipate reopening. Within our sample this accounts for 1.4 per cent of respondents, and this may be a minimum figure given it was only presented as a response option to halls that had not continued to operate during the pandemic. When we gross up to the total number of village and community halls in England, this could equate to the closure of some 140 halls across the country. This is a critical warning sign and suggests some halls need immediate support to continue.

2.2. Financial impacts and health

Changes in income and expenditure have been significant, though patterns in this are perhaps not as obvious as one might expect. The most obvious change has been that fewer halls are generating large revenues (Figure 2). Approximately 19 per cent of halls had income over £25,000 in 2019–20, but this fell to 13 per cent of halls for 2020–21. It is important to note that these figures exclude various grant support and furlough payments, so clearly this evidences the lost income from hiring, fee-earning service provision etc.

The picture on running costs is slightly different. There is a marked increase in the proportion of halls with low running costs in 2020–21 (less than £5,000), with fewer halls reporting higher running costs in 2020–21 (over £25,000). This is to be expected given the restrictions imposed through the lockdown.

Figure 2: Changes in income and expenditure on running costs



Base: 778 and 730 halls

Respondents were asked about the amount of support they had received through Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) Grants, and discretionary or other Covid-19 grants. The total amount received, from the 633 respondents completing this question, equated to £7.99m, or £12,600 per hall. Crucially, our 2020 survey established that halls, on average, generated £12,000 in fee income per year, so there is a match between the support provided through the pandemic and the significant lost income due to the restrictions. Reflecting on the potential closure of halls outlined above, perhaps financial pressures are not the only factor in explaining this.

When asked how the financial health of their hall had changed over the last year, there was divergence in views. For some (33 per cent) their finances had either improved or improved a lot, whereas for a similar proportion (34 per cent) their finances had either worsened or worsened a lot. Explaining some of this divergence is the size of the community served. When we look at responses in relation to this variable, we see a clear pattern: halls serving larger populations are much more likely to have experienced worsening financial health over the preceding year. Using the null hypothesis that there is no association between population size served and financial health, we applied a Phi coefficient test and found a significant negative association,

$\Phi = -.259, p=.000$. As evidence for this, 79 per cent of halls serving populations over 4,000 in size identify their financial situation as having worsened, much higher than the proportion of halls serving populations of less than 4,000 people (45 per cent).

Table 2: The relationship between size of community served and perceived financial health

		Worsened	Improved	Total
Smaller population served (<4,000)	Count	181	225	406
	% within smaller population served	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%
Larger population served (>4,000)	Count	67	18	85
	% within larger population served	78.8%	21.2%	100.0%

Base: 491 halls

The size of community served may be a proxy for other causally operative factors. It may be associated with the scale of a hall's income, their business models and/or diversity of income streams. Exploring this further, we looked at perceptions of financial health in relation to whether, in 2020, halls had received any income through enterprise or trading. We sought to match as many 2021 respondents as possible to their responses in 2020, and to identify those that provided answers on both their income streams and financial health.

Those stating that their financial position had worsened over the previous year were almost twice as likely to have been engaged in trading or enterprise than those who said their financial position had improved. This suggests that there are factors associated with the nature of hall's income and their business models, in addition to the size of community served, which may explain varying perceptions of financial health.

Over a quarter of halls (26 per cent) have needed to use their reserves to meet their running costs over the previous year. While over 25 per cent of respondents had seen their reserves reduced in 2020–21, just under a third (32 per cent) had seen their reserves increase. This differentiation suggests there is a cohort of halls in worsening financial health, but another cohort with greater resources than they have previously seen. It is possible that a number of halls have put some or all of their Covid-19 grants into their reserves. Exploring this further, we looked at variation in grants and payments by the level of free reserves held by halls. Those stating that their reserves had 'reduced' or 'reduced a lot' had received approximately £4,000 less in Covid-19 grants and payments, compared to those who stated their reserves had 'increased' or 'increased a lot'.

Again, this relationship may be linked to hall size or size of population served. Among those serving smaller populations (of less than 4,000 people), 22 per cent suggested their reserves have reduced to some extent, compared to 38 per cent for those serving populations greater than 4,000.

There is a substantial difference in the perceived financial health of those halls receiving RHL, discretionary or other Covid-19 grants and furlough payments, and those halls that did not. Of those halls for whom we can establish no such grants had been received, 80 per cent saw their financial situation as having worsened. Less than

30 per cent of halls receiving these grants and payments saw their finances being worse than previously seen.

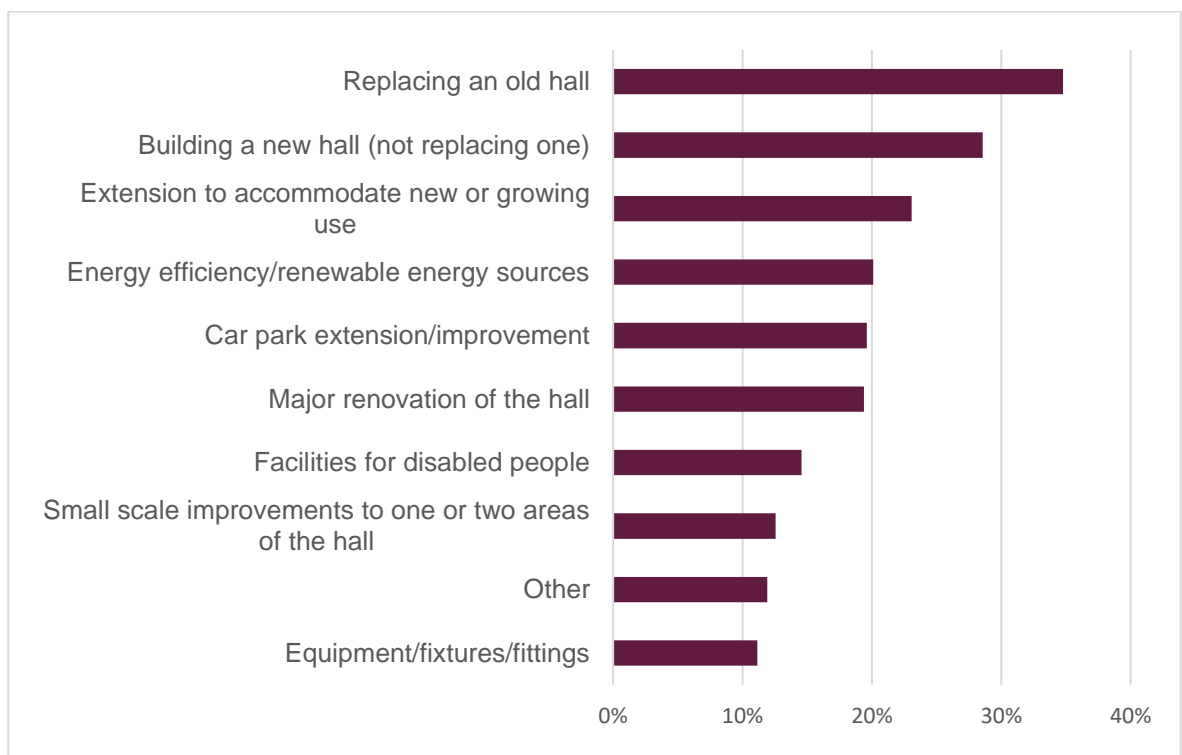
A minority of halls will have drawn on furlough payments, given that only 17 per cent of the sample had previously employed staff. For these halls, nine per cent had decreased their staffing hours as a result of Covid -19. This adds to the evidence below about potential impacts of the pandemic on the internal capacity within some halls.

There is greater optimism about the financial outlook. While 33 per cent of halls felt their hall's financial position had worsened over the previous year, only 19 per cent felt this would continue over the coming three years. Interestingly, there does not seem to be a strong association between responses on financial outlook and population size served.

2.3. Impacts on hall improvement and services

Of the different improvements that were planned to halls, there are disparities between those still to be undertaken and those that are no longer going ahead. Across the sample we identified 151 halls where at least one type of improvement was previously planned but no longer being carried out. Of those halls planning to replace their old hall, over a third had abandoned these plans. Similarly, a high proportion of those planning to build a new hall were now not planning to do so. Lower proportions were evident for other types of improvement, but still over 10 per cent of those planning upgrades to equipment, fixtures and fittings will now not undertake this work. It is important to note numerical differences also, as well as the variation in proportions. Over 350 of the halls surveyed had - prior to Covid-19 - planned some improvements to equipment, fixtures and fittings, while only 15 planned to replace their old hall. Hence, there is a quantitative difference in these planned improvements, and how many will not now go ahead.

Figure 3: Proportion of planned improvements no longer going ahead as scheduled



Base: 151 halls

Exploring the responses of those 151 halls that had planned improvements but no longer intended to complete the work is revealing. These halls were more likely to state that in 2020 –21 they had used their reserves to meet their running costs. 33 per cent of this sub-sample had used reserves during the pandemic, as opposed to only 26 per cent in the wider sample. This suggests that trade-off decisions are being made, where halls needing to use their reserves for running costs may be cancelling planned improvements. This insight may help target future grant and financial support. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 38 per cent of halls no longer undertaking planned improvements perceive their financial position to have worsened, 5 percentage points more than the sample as a whole. In order to ensure these improvements are undertaken, the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund should be re-established. This could potentially target halls that had to postpone or cancel work in order to use their reserves to replace lost income.

2.4. Changes in the use of halls and their services

A significant proportion of halls have been used over the last year as part of the response to Covid-19. Approximately 15 per cent of halls responding had been used in support of NHS activities or other community services. Nearly half of these halls had been involved in some form of food or delivery provision and/or foodbank service. Some of these were still running in early 2021; as one hall put it, they were still making *'emergency food boxes...300 made up for the community and still ongoing but scaled down.'* Many other halls had hosted Covid-19 testing centres, vaccination days, blood donation sessions, and pop-up shops and post offices, while others had been involved in making protective equipment and 'scrubs'.

When analysing this data, it becomes clear that halls have played a key role in local responses to Covid -19 - serving to underline the vital role they play in delivery of services. Given the role performed by halls in emergencies such as Covid -19, there is a case for additional resources to be offered where additional responsibilities are borne.

Our survey asked halls about new activities and services planned for when halls can reopen fully. Responses focus on new classes, particularly those relating to sport, yoga and other physical activities, as well as those targeting children and young people. For a small number of halls that are operating as new venues, having been developed over the course of the pandemic, this issue is particularly significant as they seek to maximise usage of a new building.

'We have a brand new hall, completed last summer. We have a wedding booked and returning fitness activities. Wine classes, lunches for elderly and WI will recommence. We plan more fitness classes, film nights, wine classes, promote Kids Club, M&Toddlers, sports events...'

Financial imperatives are clear in hall responses, with significant mention of fundraising events. This correlates with responses below about halls' biggest challenge being a decrease in fundraising. As one respondent put it, in reference to planned activities, they will be organising *'just lots of community fundraising events.'*

Perhaps equally important is the sense that halls are ever more aware of their role in bringing people together after significant time apart. When asked about future plans, *'becoming more of a community venue'* and *'trying to increase the amount of local people involve[d]'*, are just some of the responses that exemplify this. Halls are planning *'functions for community get-togethers'* and they are also investing, or have invested, capital resources to expand their use:

'A new Conference Room has been developed which should encourage greater diversity in use.'

'We refurbished our main hall during lockdown. The new space lends itself to more community activities which we hope to encourage when allowed.'

'Major redevelopment and extensions planned to start later this year SUBJECT TO FUNDING.'

Some of these investments and widening of activities and services are premised on halls trying to broaden and diversify their user base. This is a recurring theme in their responses:

'We need to attract new users to take the place of those we have lost. Not all users have rebooked yet.'

'[We are] looking to try to start new activities for younger people, get a website designed, [and] promote the hall more widely.'

Alongside this desire to attract new users, a number of halls aim to target vulnerable users, and to address some of the impacts of the pandemic on older people. As one hall noted, they will 'create a new social care focus and support for the old and vulnerable.' Others will have 'increased social activities for older members of the community.'

A number of halls were, prior to the pandemic, used for educational purposes. Among respondent halls 192 were previously used for pre-school provision, 96 for before and after school activities, and 31 for formal schooling. When these schools were asked if these services reopened when permitted to, only 71 halls said no. Clearly, alongside their contribution to NHS services and other community provisions, halls have played a key role in childcare provision to key workers and other parents.

There is evidence in open responses that a small proportion of childcare and educational services have been lost and will not return. At least four respondents noted how out-of-school provision, pre-school, or formal schooling was to end in their hall. Halls recognise this is a significant issue not least because it can be an important source of income:

'[The] after-school club has stopped trading due to Covid, which was the biggest income for the centre prior to Covid.'

Other services or activities appear not to be returning as halls reopen. While evidence above suggests that new classes, sports and clubs are being planned by some halls, perhaps more are being closed or discontinued. Open responses suggest that numerous classes and clubs folded as a result of Covid-19 and will not return. 29 respondents specifically mention yoga classes and similar numbers identify Pilates and dance classes that will not return immediately. Specific issues are likely to be experienced with clubs and sessions for older people, where it is expected users will not return quickly and in significant numbers. This was exemplified by one hall's response:

'Many of our groups are attended by older residents. Some have said they will not return, others may not until vaccination is complete. A few groups will return with much fewer numbers.'

There does seem to be a differentiation made by some respondents in terms of those activities which are making a delayed return and those which have folded. One respondent noted how their 'Whist Club has folded and Line Dancing is likely to fold',

but that 'other groups (stitch craft, quilting and indoor bowls) [will be] resuming in the *autumn*.' It is difficult to establish a pattern in those activities that seem unlikely to return and those which are simply being put on hold.

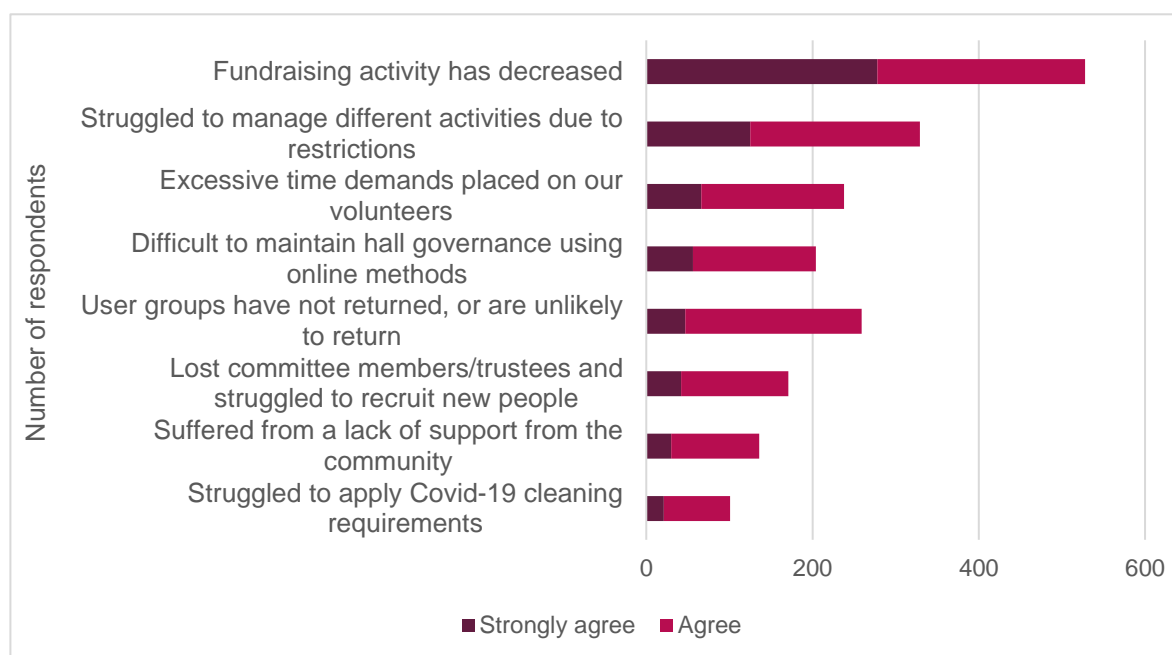
There is a role for ACRE here as halls seek to promote their services and diversify the activities undertaken in their buildings. We recommend that the ACRE Network undertakes work nationally to promote the availability of halls and their uses to different audiences and user groups.

Perceived challenges and risks

Our survey sought to capture and assess some of the specific challenges halls have faced as a result of the pandemic (Figure 4). Of particular note is how social distancing measures and the enforced closure of halls has hampered fundraising. 72 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their fundraising has decreased in the last year, and that this was a significant problem. The connections here with perceived worsening financial health are obvious. Alongside this, halls have struggled with planning and managing activities under frequently changing rules and restrictions, and how this has placed significant burdens on staff and, notably, volunteers. Nearly a third of respondent halls agree with the statement, 'There have been excessive time demands placed on our volunteers.'

Other problems are also apparent. 28 per cent of halls found it difficult to maintain hall governance using online methods. Nearly a quarter of halls say they have lost committee members or trustees, and are struggling to recruit new members. This is perhaps not as stark an issue as might be expected given that in our 2020 survey, 50 per cent of halls stated they regularly had 'difficulty recruiting new committee members.' It may be the case that other problems (such as fundraising) have become more prominent than issues relating to trustee/member recruitment. Back in 2020 only 16 per cent of respondent halls stated they lacked support from the local community. In 2021, this was 18 per cent and within the margin of error. Again, this is perhaps not as significant a change as we might expect. Worries about the return of user groups are prevalent, however, with over a third of halls agreeing this was a problem they faced.

Figure 4: The problems faced in the previous year



Base: 735–739 responses for each response option.

Open responses to questions on the impact of the pandemic reveal some of the nuances of the challenges faced. These fall largely within the themes of governance and operational challenges, financial challenges, and challenges associated with volunteers.

3.1. Governance and operations

Recent restrictions had not only closed village halls for users but also for their committees and sub-groups. Shifting to online forms of communication has posed additional challenges to the individuals involved. New communication procedures have had to be developed and technological capabilities acquired in order to facilitate remote meetings. Challenges have also been unfolding in relation to workloads and coping with the new requirements and working realities:

‘I have found that holding remote meetings with committee members has been challenging and demanding.’

‘So many things to consider, especially in relation to communication with our users and putting in appropriate arrangements with staff.’

These difficulties have also caused some halls to be less responsive and agile, even though the pandemic has required rapid responses and decision-making, particularly in the early days of the outbreak. Some halls have reacted to this by scrutinising their governance structures and adapting these. As one hall noted, ‘The pandemic has made us review the Hall Rules of Management to reduce the size of the Management Committee and streamline the decision-making process.’

For others, these types of adjustment have not been possible, and they have been limited in their ability to act and react: *‘The committee has been restricted in its activities by people shielding and/or self-isolating, plus one member not having any online capability.’*

A major problem for halls has been the lack of clear guidance and the changing rules and regulations. Respondents suggested some of the decisions made through the course of the pandemic increased workload and decreased effectiveness of their own governance processes: *'We have done a lot of planning but with the constant changes it has made this process very fraught.'*

The increased effort needed to develop ideas and set-up procedures left many village halls unable to respond. Not all halls had sufficient human resources to understand and incorporate all the regulations and guidance released. Others, however, were able to assimilate this and act quickly. As one respondent noted, *'I spend part of my working day looking at [governmental] guidance so I am used to interpreting it.'* However, the ability to respond to changing regulations meant that many village halls chose to leave their doors closed.

Respondents generally emphasise the very high levels of uncertainty around future activity and use. In the early stages of the pandemic, there had been no distinct rules or guidelines addressing their unique nature and role in communities. Not being subject to distinct regulations, but being dependent on the good will of volunteers and support of umbrella organisations, may have limited what halls could do in response to the outbreak.

The frustration created by this may present significant risks for future hall governance. Uncertainty about the future may impede good governance, recruitment of new members and forward planning. New issues are emerging in terms of funding and fundraising, which is taking on a renewed significance, as respondents are seeking more information and training to handle this.

A number of risks associated with these developments are apparent. The retention of current volunteers and recruitment of new ones is a particular challenge of which halls are cognisant:

'I fear that because most of our committee members are retirement age we will struggle to regain enthusiasm for managing the hall.'

3.2. Financial challenges

Respondent halls highlighted how the emergency Covid-19 grants had, to some extent, compensated for their loss of income, but also in some cases helped improve their financial position (for instance, as unused grants were added to hall reserves). It is unclear how halls have used their Covid-19 grants and payments, and whether for a number it has simply boosted reserves. For those in a better financial position, the opportunities presented by the pandemic, with halls closed for significant periods, has enabled them to undertake various improvements. Halls reported efforts to redecorate, improve and upgrade their premises while the building was empty.

Generally, the main financial impact of the pandemic has been a reduction in income, but this is also intertwined with significantly less internal capacity and resources:

'The pandemic has been a disaster for the hall as we have lost members who helped with the running of the hall and used most of our reserves.'

This short-term financial hit is likely to have a long-term negative impact on the financial stability of halls:

'Although finances are reasonably OK at the moment thanks to the government grant, it is difficult to say what the long-term picture will look like as nobody knows how long it will take for people to have the confidence to book the larger events'

that generate a large portion of our income. The income from the routine bookings by groups and clubs don't cover all our running costs and over time this will *deplete our reserves.*'

Respondents particularly highlight concerns about the return of activities to halls, as social gatherings are the main source of income for these venues:

'We spent a large part of the government grant on preparing the building to reopen. 60% of our groups promised to return in August; they did not. We made £250 pcm in September and October; we need £1.2k per month to meet our bills.'

'Our community is pretty elderly and although our hall and events are usually well supported, we know from talking to people that it is going to take some time to get everyone out and joining in. Having been isolated for over a year, quite a few are nervous about rejoining life again so it is going to take time and effort to persuade them to take part in our planned events [...] Time will tell if we are successful.'

The above emphasises the need for further bridging grants in order to facilitate a financial survival of village halls, in particular for these to overcome the initial *'reopening period when revenues may still be under normal levels, but operating costs [are] fixed.'* We recommend urgent attention is given to some form of bridging funding or finance, so halls can survive this period of uncertainty.

Again, the uncertainties on how regulations will change and evolve, which rules will be eased in the coming weeks and months, and the change in usage of halls is difficult to predict. Therefore, several respondents were reluctant to make optimistic statements about the future. As one hall succinctly put it, 'Until we open fully after 17th May, we cannot be sure how our finances will be affected.'

3.3. Challenges associated with volunteers

Open responses highlight the urgent and increasing need for more community input in terms of volunteers contributing to running halls, as well as users engaging in activities. Although this issue may have been present before the pandemic, it is still a pressing challenge as lots of volunteers are elderly and vulnerable to Covid-19.

The short-term impact of the pandemic has, generally speaking, been an increase in the workload of volunteers running halls. New regulations and restrictions, including new health and safety measures, required in-depth attention and assessment:

'Some Committee members are Key Workers which has put a strain on the other Committee members to cover all the work and tasks necessary to meet ongoing maintenance and running of the hall, and to adhere to the changing rules and regulations.'

'We are fortunate in having an experienced and committed Hall Manager who, working with the Chair of the management committee, has organised all measures relating to lockdowns and reopenings in an effective and safe manner. However, it has placed a lot of pressure on these two individuals.'

For some halls this additional burden was directly related to their ability to open:

'Our Hall has been closed during the pandemic due to the cost and difficulties of keeping it open.'

Increases in workload have also arisen as some halls took the opportunity presented by the pandemic to undertake maintenance and refurbishment activity. The demands

on volunteers in these halls may have been significant. As one respondent noted, 'volunteers have supported refurbishment activity to [the extent of] over 1,000 hours of labour and skill.'

There are great concerns about whether and how volunteers may return. It is expected that especially older individuals may not take up their voluntary commitment again: 'Although they have all had both vaccinations, there seems to be a reluctance to get *involved again*.' In addition to losing former volunteers, the last year has 'not been a good *time to recruit more volunteers!*' Clearly, the lack of volunteers presents an existential threat to some halls: 'But we have no idea if our previous users or volunteers *will return. If they don't we shall close permanently.*'

Nonetheless, it is still early days concerning the reopening and reviving of public life. Respondents' key sentiment is one of uncertainty. There is no information or experience available to assess whether and how people may return:

'We do not yet know how it has affected our volunteer base as many are in the vulnerable category.'

'We are unsure if our volunteers will return.'

Support received and required

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about the support they had received through the pandemic, and the support they require in future. In the following section we use a mixture of quantitative data and analysis of open responses to explore these issues further. We look first at the support received and the perceived value of this, before assessing halls' preferred options for future support.

4.1. The type and value of grants received

As noted above, RHL and other Covid-19 related grants and payments have played a key role in stabilising the income of halls through the pandemic. Open response questions shed more light on the value of these to halls, with the majority greatly appreciative of the support. In the short term these funds helped many village halls ride out the uncertainty:

'The grants ...received have saved [the hall] from financial difficulty, but [we] have suffered as a result of a loss of a year's trading'.

'The local funding has been invaluable to the hall's survival.'

'Government grants have been fantastic.'

Although not many respondents explicitly stated how they have experienced the accessibility of these grants, the fact that lots of halls have been able to obtain these may indicate that the barriers to access were low:

'We were astonished to be asked to apply for a grant and by how easy it was to obtain one.'

Most sources for grants have been governmental funds such as the Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF), and these have been critical to halls' survival. The role of local authorities and parish councils is also significant, and some halls attribute beneficial support to them:

'We have received solid financial support from the council without which the hall would probably have closed for good... Without this lifeline it isn't worth thinking about the alternative outcome.'

Various forms of support have enabled halls to manage financial pressures, not least in the form of rate relief. The importance of this, alongside other grants, should not be underestimated:

[We have been] provided a grant of £10,000 to small businesses [and have been] eligible for Small Business Rate Relief. This represents 3 years of expenditure on running costs and has transformed the finances of the charitable organisation.'

'We qualified for business rate relief, two grants from government, and an increased annual grant from the Parish Council. This puts us in a better place than we were anticipating before the Covid pandemic. It allowed us to make a couple of expensive repairs and to plan for some minor purchases which will improve our hall.'

Therefore, grants have not only been used to help village halls survive a year of closure, but provided the stability and certainty upon which capital investments can be made.

Grant funding did not receive universal approval however, and it had created some ethical dilemmas for halls. One respondent highlighted that *'whilst very welcome'*, the lack of means-testing had meant the funding offered *'more than covered our loss of income and left us in a better financial position.'* This led respondents to reflect on the grant allocation process:

'We have found that the formulaic Covid grants paid automatically to us are likely to exceed our financial losses from Covid and so have repaid some amounts to avoid making an inappropriate profit from them.'

ACRE has argued that surplus funds could be put into reserves since there may be future impacts from Covid-19 that are not yet fully understood. Future local lockdowns, an outbreak in the community, or a requirement to take a particular action to safeguard vulnerable people are just some examples which may have resource implications.

Despite these dilemmas, many halls are clearly still struggling financially, despite government support, and will require further financial contributions to bridge the difficult period between reopening and returning to previous levels of income.

4.2. Advice and support accessed

For two fifths of respondents, ACRE member organisations were the main sources of advice and support during the pandemic. For around a quarter, ACRE were the primary source of information and advice. This advice has been valued by halls, as articulated by numerous respondents:

'The support from ACRE is invaluable.'

'ACRE has been invaluable through the pandemic via their reopening the Hall updates.'

'Community Action Northumberland, which is part of the ACRE Network, has been excellent.'

Since February 2020, over half the halls responding to the survey (54 per cent) had sought advice from their village hall/community building service provided by an ACRE Network member. 98 per cent of those respondents receiving this support felt it was 'good' or 'excellent'. This is markedly higher than responses in the 2020 National Village Hall Survey where 84 per cent rated the service 'good or 'excellent'. This suggests that ACRE Network member services have made a valued contribution during the pandemic, as halls have grappled with the challenges and risks outlined above.

Nonetheless, these challenges remain. Although respondents emphasise the quality and importance of the information ACRE prepares and publishes, there is still a need for updated information and guidance. This is particularly acute in respect to changing regulations and the easing of restrictions.

'[We need] complete clarity from ACRE in terms of the hiring of the hall, i.e. what are we allowed to do and what not under government restrictions.'

Specialist advice on issues such as risk assessments is taking on renewed importance, and accessing this support is difficult as resources are squeezed:

'ACRE were helpful, but it would be great if halls could be offered a free service by a specialist in this field to bring all our risk assessments and health and safety policies up to date.'

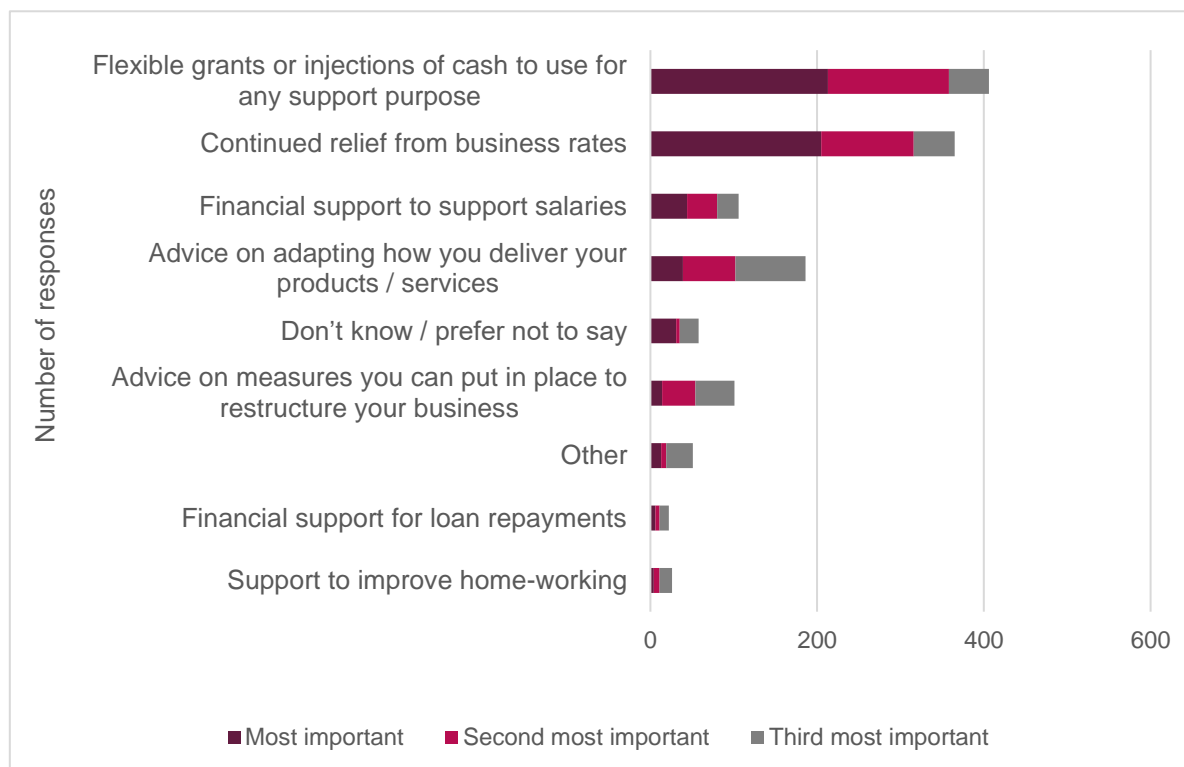
Hence, one of the key ongoing support needs for halls is information and advice in meeting a frequently changing context, where public health concerns are at the forefront of their thinking, and where halls have limited resources to process information and adapt quickly. To provide this support, ACRE Network members need to be adequately resourced to deliver their support services, and we recommend that this issue is reviewed.

4.3. Preferred options for future support

The survey asked respondents which forms of support are most important to them as they respond and recover from Covid-19. Respondents were asked to rank these support types by the three most important. Figure 5 shows this data, ordered by the options deemed the single most important. Flexible grants alongside continued relief from business rates were seen as the most important by over a third of respondents (37 and 36 per cent respectively). In aggregate, 71 per cent of respondents deemed flexible grants to be in their top three most important support types. 64 per cent of respondents had continued business rate relief in their top three.

On the basis of these findings, we recommend urgent attention is given to forms of flexible funding, especially to bridge the forthcoming period of uncertainty. We also recommend that halls across England benefit from the mandatory and full discretionary rate relief. Policy mechanisms should be used to ensure this happens at the local authority level. The details of what grants would be most valuable in future, and what they would be used for, are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 5: Preferred forms of support (the three most important)



Base: 569 responses selecting at least the most important form of support

Further analysis has been undertaken to assess whether the future support needs of halls align with the wider sector. Specific questions in our survey replicated those used in the Community Business Market Survey² undertaken in mid-2020. With the exception of business rate relief, the most important support needs of halls are the same as those in the wider community business sector. In place of business rate relief, other community businesses had advice on restructuring their business as a key support need. The similarity in responses suggests there be policy and funding interventions that can be generically applied but nonetheless valued by different types of community business and voluntary organisation.

4.4. The nature and form of future support

Looking at the open responses of halls reveals how the support they require is diverse, and varies depending on their type and experience over the previous year. Nonetheless, it is possible to summarise these support needs into three main categories:

1. Community involvement:

- Needing more volunteers.
- Needing new trustees to take on work and responsibility.
- Needing the community to revive village halls and use their offer as soon as restrictions are lifted.

² Community Business Market Survey (2020). Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Accessed at: https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CBM-Initial-Analysis_Final_updated-1.pdf

2. Financial support:
 - To maintain and improve buildings.
 - To help cover reduced income streams.
 - To allow village halls to survive in the long term.
3. Information and training:
 - Receiving general advice.
 - Particular advice concerning legal obligations and Covid-related regulations.
 - Special advice on further topics such as professional assistance on recruiting volunteers, health and safety regulations and requirements, and funding bids.

1. Community involvement

A lack of community input was identified by most respondents. The decreasing involvement of local residents in voluntary activities caused great fears for some and increased the workload of those volunteers still active. Additionally, several organisations have relied heavily on older volunteers, which has caused concerns about future governance arrangements.

The age of volunteers creates an ongoing need to recruit younger members, and to free existing members from roles they may have occupied for a long time:

'We need trustees and younger people (below 70) to continue to run the hall successfully.'

'Volunteers as current trustees feel trapped [in] their roles.'

The pandemic has amplified these issues. Volunteers' increased probability of severe illness with Covid-19, and likelihood of needing to shield over the last 14 months, has created a range of operational and governance challenges. Key individuals have not been able to support their local hall in ways they previously had, and there remain ongoing concerns about whether these individuals will return:

'It depends on whether they will want to come out when life returns, will they feel safe, will they want to bother? The future is still very uncertain for the older generation.'

'The pandemic has made them fearful.'

Respondents reflected on not being able to access younger volunteers to take over responsibility in managing and running the hall. It is assumed that by recruiting younger trustees and members, halls would not only secure the future governance of the hall but also develop more attractive service offers for younger people - changing hall activities and events to provide a *'life away from the tablet/phone.'* As one hall noted, *'We struggle to attract a younger element both to use the facilities and to get involved with the running of the hall.'*

It is however acknowledged that lifestyles have changed, and a lot of people are busy with other daily responsibilities: *'All the younger people are so busy with work and families that they don't have time to help us.'*

Some respondents identify not only the need for more (and younger) volunteers, but rather the need for professional advice and training on how to address the issue of not

being able to attract and enthuse younger people, and to tackle long-term trends in voluntary engagement, particularly for those in the 25–44 age category.³

2. Financial support

Financial support has also been a major concern for village halls. Although the grants received have generally been greatly appreciated, respondents clearly identify the need for further financial support. Halls identify significant maintenance costs which they are not able to meet. For some, Covid-19 has depleted their organisational resources and their ability to raise money locally, either by fundraising activities or by offering paid services. Additionally, due to the pandemic, halls perceive a reduction in the grants available to undertake maintenance and improvement work, with most funding now focused on the pandemic and its immediate impacts:

'The Hall applied for a lottery grant to replace windows with double glazing, in the region of £10,000, but the funding was removed to help Covid related issues.'

These maintenance costs can often be significant, given the age of the village hall stock nationally. Unsurprisingly then, this is one of the pressing concerns halls articulated:

'We desperately need money to replace the main hall roof as it leaks.'

'Ideally we would like to replace the oil central heating but would need financial assistance for such a large outlay.'

'[We need a] further grant to continue [to] improve [the] hall and facilities. We have had to upgrade [the] heating system and install new fire alarms to meet new legislation.'

Environmental sustainability and legal requirements are often mentioned as reasons why halls need to undertake refurbishment and improvements. The improvements would also, it is argued, contribute to lower the running costs:

'We need [a] large capital outlay to bring the building up to a more environmentally sustainable standard so we can reduce our running costs (especially for heat and power).'

Aside from these capital outlays, village halls fear not being financially viable until restrictions are lifted completely, and communities have fully recovered. There is a demand therefore for bridging grants to facilitate village halls to cope with the immediate uncertainty:

'If we cannot run enough activities that use the bar, we will not break even and will continue to need financial support to survive.'

'If people do return to the activities they were doing before Covid then we can continue to run a sustainable business. However, it could be many months before we are back to full capacity. A 'bridging grant' to recognise that [will be needed]. If restrictions go on longer than the current Road Map, continued support [is needed] through furlough, hospitality grants etc.'

³ See for example ONS (2017). Billion pound loss in volunteering effort. Accessed at: [https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/billionpoundlossinvolunteeringeffort/2017-03-16#:~:text=Despite%20the%20value%20of%20the,Life%20Survey%20\(CLS\)%20show](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/billionpoundlossinvolunteeringeffort/2017-03-16#:~:text=Despite%20the%20value%20of%20the,Life%20Survey%20(CLS)%20show)

3. Information and training

The frequently changing restrictions and legal requirements left lots of halls uncertain about the best course of action throughout the pandemic. For some, guidance from central government has been difficult to process: 'What we can and cannot do has *been hard to work out from the government website.*'

Information, training and advice has been much needed and appreciated and was identified as a future support need in order to ensure safe and legal operations. Halls particularly need 'advice on the types of activities that are permitted [as the] analysis of government guidelines is *difficult, and clarity is needed.*'

Further to this, respondents outlined their need for help concerning risk assessments and health and safety regulations. Volunteers are uncertain about how to ensure a 'Covid-safe' environment:

'[We need] risk assessment help. What happens if we have a Covid-19 case and it stops the use of the hall? How to reassure users it is safe and what requirements we and the users need to put in place?'

Apart from Covid-19 related information and training, halls are also in need of further training on financial planning and management, how to attract volunteers and community engagement (explained above), marketing, and governance and management. These needs also emerge due to new realities in a post-Covid context as halls are concerned about their future survival. Hence, there is a need to build capacity relating to bid writing and fundraising, as well as developing marketing skills to advertise halls and their services:

'[We need] advice on marketing to a wider range of new users, bearing in mind we have new and improved facilities and protocols for Covid-safe operation.'

'[We want to] improve marketing including an increased use of IT and digital support. [We need] to develop a high-quality volunteer offer.'

'A more centralised place to find out about grants available.'

'Specialist input to fundraising and bid development.'

Information and advice on governance is a perceived need, though this requirement was often only vaguely articulated: 'We always need advice on *good governance.*' Information and training targeted specifically at new trustees and members would be valued, 'to help new members of the committee understand the requirements of *trustees.*'

For halls to meet the great challenges ahead, it is clear that support must take diverse forms. This should encompass both increased support from local communities themselves, but also greater financial assistance to ensure halls are fit for purpose. Training and advice are also needed to help halls adapt and respond during a period of continued uncertainty. Further resources are needed for the external bodies, such as ACRE Network members, that can help halls better engage with their local communities and develop a stronger volunteer base.

Sheffield Hallam University

The Impact of Covid-19 on Village and Community Halls in England - Findings Report

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OUR PLACE WYE



Ashford TN25 

March 2022

To Whom it May Concern

Our Place Wye is a Community Interest Company (C.I.C.) Company Number 10157557 based in the village of Wye, Ashford, Kent.

www.ourplacewye.org.uk. and Facebook group Our Place Wye.

Previously a project of Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council, Our Place Wye was incorporated in 2016 to deliver a range of projects and activities in the village to 'nurture a more inclusive and integrated community'. This venture is run by volunteers and our projects are partially funded by grants. We have a large number of volunteers who organise and run projects such as the Sensory Garden and the Can Do café. One of our long standing projects is the community lunch, which prior to the pandemic was weekly, and will now be monthly. We would like to be able to provide home cooked lunches for the community instead of the commercially prepared ones we currently serve. Our current premises are not suitable for this so we would like

to use the Methodist Hall as it has the only suitable kitchen in the village. We are looking to re-start the Options club which previously met in the Methodist Hall and currently is suspended as it has no space available in the village.

We have a management group which meets regularly and, prior to the Coronavirus lockdown we met in the upstairs room of the Methodist Hall. In addition we used the Hall's meeting room to train and support our volunteers for the Befriending service we offer. This space, with the other rooms in the Hall, has been valuable for the community to use. Many of our service users have mobility needs and several are sight impaired. The disabled access to the Hall is vital. Continued community use of and access to the Methodist Hall is a vital part of village life.

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Director (and previous Chair) Our Place Wye

Kent County Council Community Warden statement: Wye Methodist Church

11 March 2022

To Whom it may concern,

I am the Kent County Council Community Warden for Wye, Chilham and Godmersham. I have worked in Wye for almost ten years. My role during this time has evolved from mainly dealing with low level crime and crime prevention to a role where I try to improve community resilience, support the elderly and vulnerable, foster community cohesion and wellbeing and assist with navigating community services.

Over the years I have spent lots of time at the Methodist church in Wye. The Methodist church was not only a place of worship but also a thriving community asset where several clubs and societies would meet. Often meetings were held in the side hall or upstairs room. These meeting included Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council, the Flood Working Group and Our Place Wye CIC.

Every Thursday morning the Options Club would meet in the side hall where up to thirty mainly elderly residents would meet for tea, coffee, biscuits a good chat and a game of scrabble. The club would start at 10.00 and I would regularly attend the club and chat with those in attendance about crime trends, crime prevention, and village issues. At 11.00 there would be an invited guest speaker who would captivate the audience with their knowledge on a particular subject. I have been the guest speaker about twice a year up until Covid-19 put a stop to proceedings.

Since the Methodist church closed Our Place Wye and myself have been looking for a suitable venue within Wye to restart the Options Club. Our Place Wye and myself understand the impact of nearly two years without most clubs and societies running and the isolation elderly vulnerable residents have felt.

Both village halls are fully booked and the pavilion is too small to accommodate thirty plus residents. Sadly there is no other suitable available venues that can be privately hired and used by the Options club.

If the Methodist church could be purchased as a community venue then clubs, societies and classes like the Options Club, Sewing Club, aerobics and others could thrive again.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

KCC Community Warden Wye

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